



US00924512B1

(12) **United States Patent**
Zhang et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,924,512 B1**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Mar. 20, 2018**

(54) **OFDMA WITH BLOCK TONE ASSIGNMENT FOR WLAN**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 1637 days.

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(21) Appl. No.: **12/730,651**

IEEE P802.16Rev2/D5 (Jun. 2008); Part 16: Air Interface for Broadband Wireless Access Systems.*

(22) Filed: **Mar. 24, 2010**

(Continued)

Related U.S. Application Data

Primary Examiner — Michael J Moore, Jr.

(60) Provisional application No. 61/162,780, filed on Mar. 24, 2009.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

(51) **Int. Cl.**
H04W 4/00 (2009.01)
H04W 72/04 (2009.01)
H04L 5/00 (2006.01)
H04W 84/12 (2009.01)

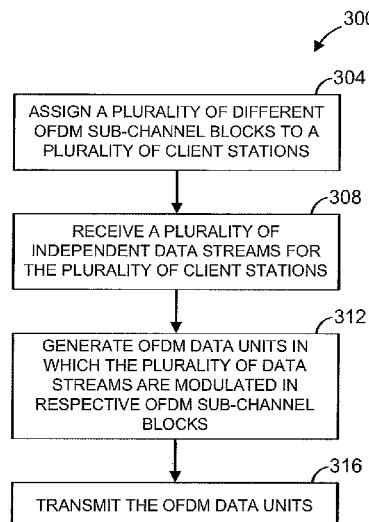
A plurality of different orthogonal frequency division multiplexing (OFDM) sub-channel blocks are assigned to a plurality of devices including a first device and a second device. The plurality of OFDM sub-channel blocks includes a first OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the first device and a second OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the second device. Data for the first device and data for the second device are received. OFDM data units are generated, wherein data for the first device is modulated on sub-channels in the first OFDM sub-channel block and data for the second device is modulated on sub-channels in the second OFDM sub-channel block. At least one of the OFDM sub-channel blocks is formatted to substantially conform to a physical layer specification of a WLAN communication protocol having a maximum channel bandwidth smaller than a bandwidth of the generated OFDM data units.

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **H04W 72/0453** (2013.01); **H04L 5/003** (2013.01); **H04L 5/0007** (2013.01); **H04W 84/12** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC H04W 84/12; H04W 72/0453; H04W 72/0413; H04W 74/0816; H04W 88/08; H04W 72/0446; H04W 74/006; H04W 72/042; H04W 72/04; H04L 5/0007; H04L 5/0048; H04L 5/0055; H04L 27/2601; H04L 27/2602

See application file for complete search history.

30 Claims, 15 Drawing Sheets



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FIG. 1

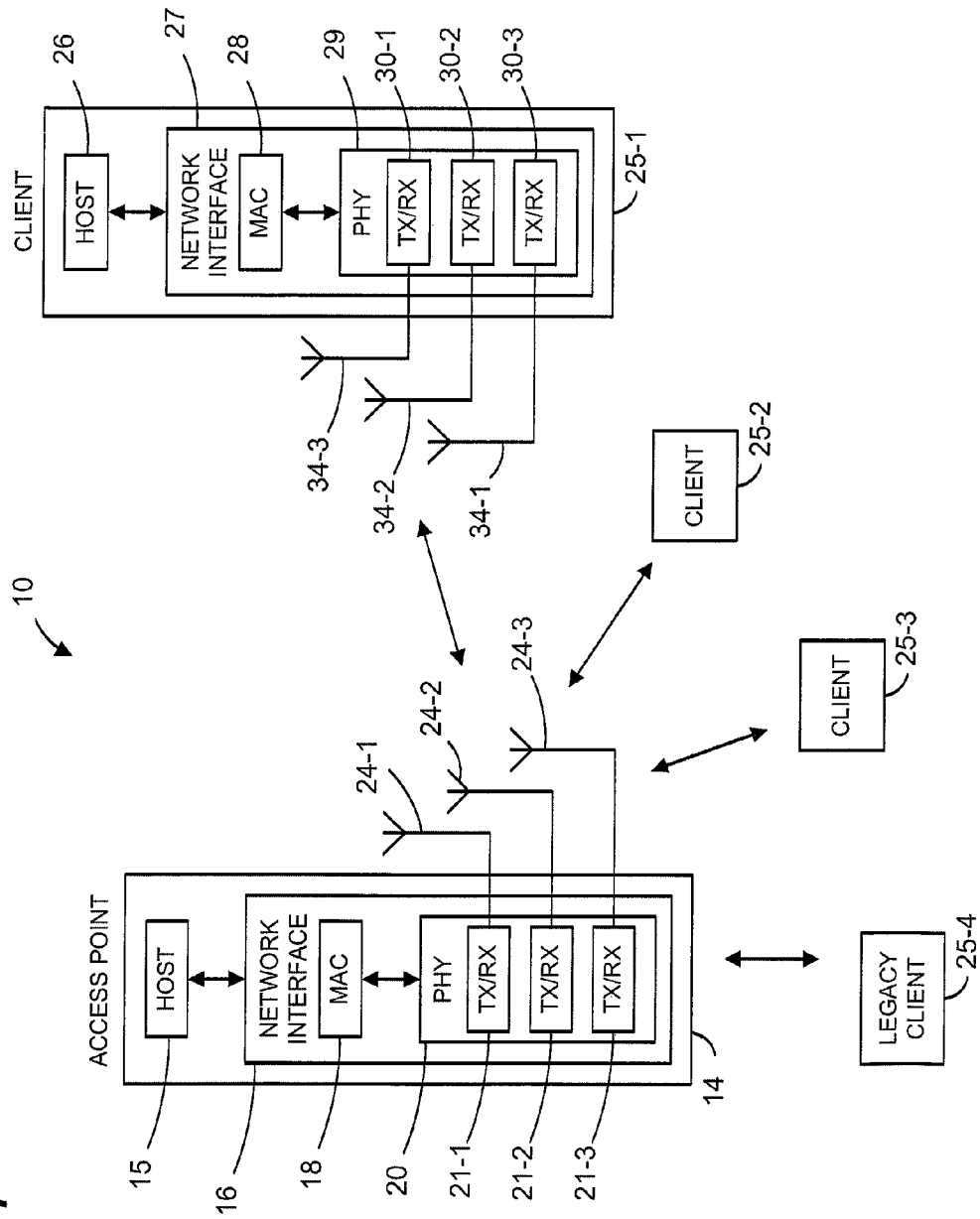


FIG. 2A

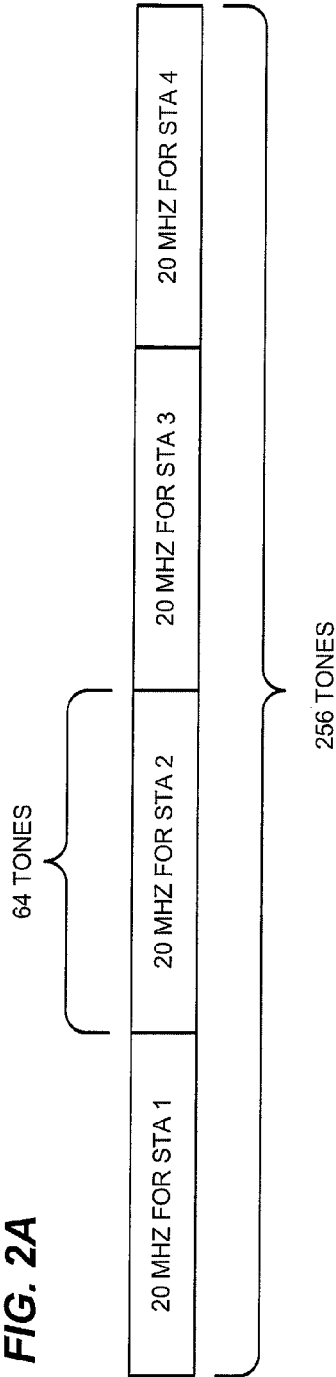


FIG. 2B

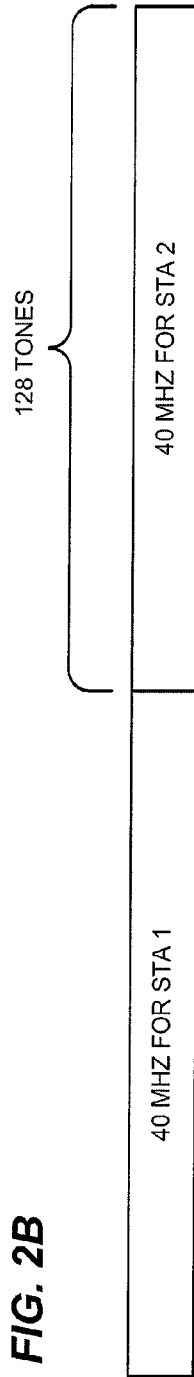


FIG. 2C



FIG. 3

(N+1)-TH OFDM SYMBOL

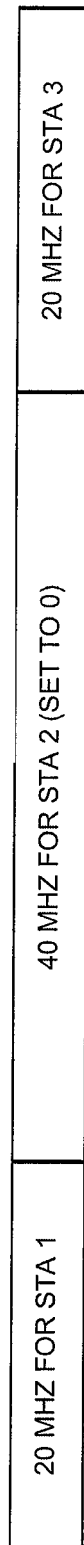


FIG. 4

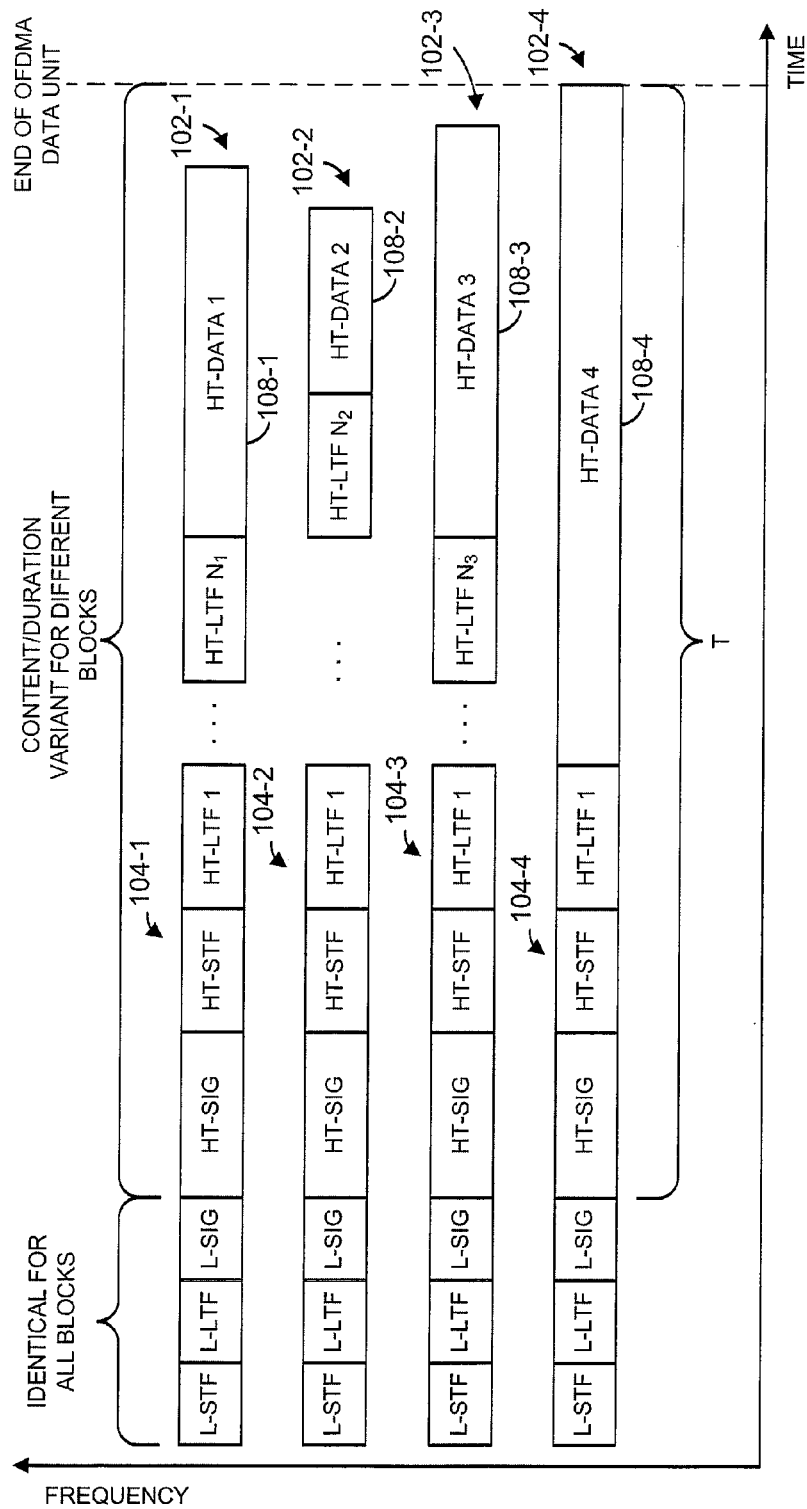
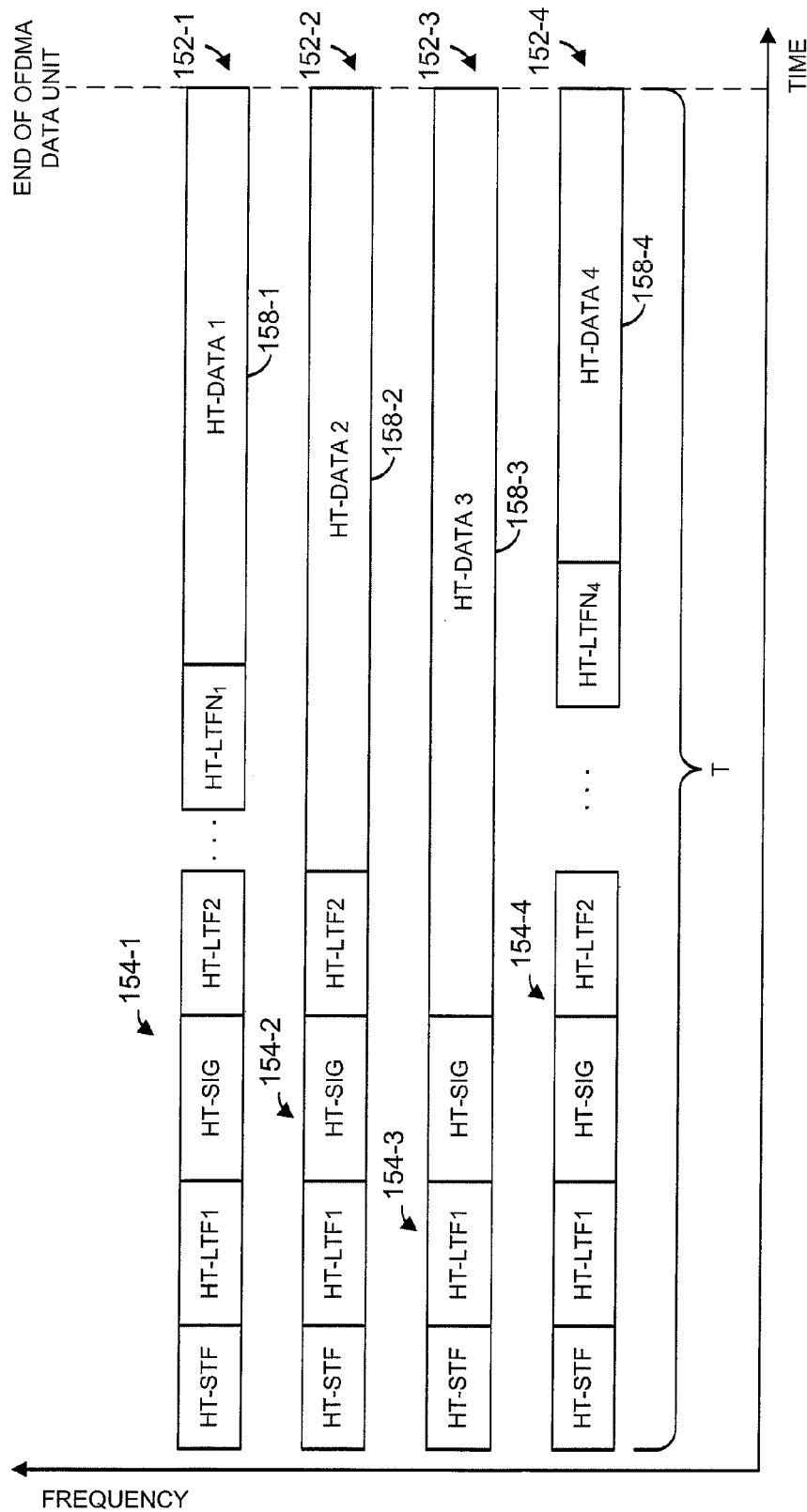


FIG. 5



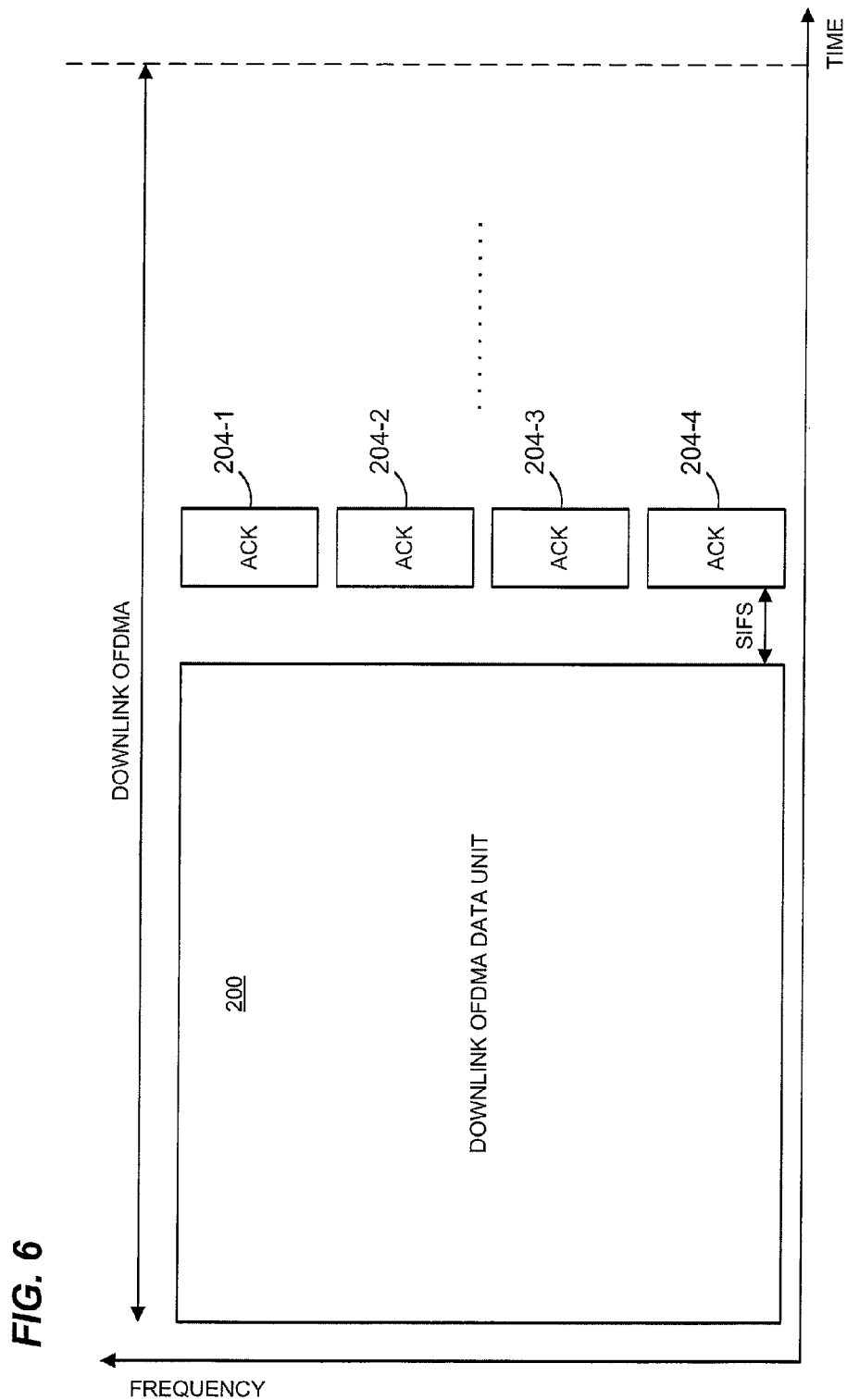


FIG. 7

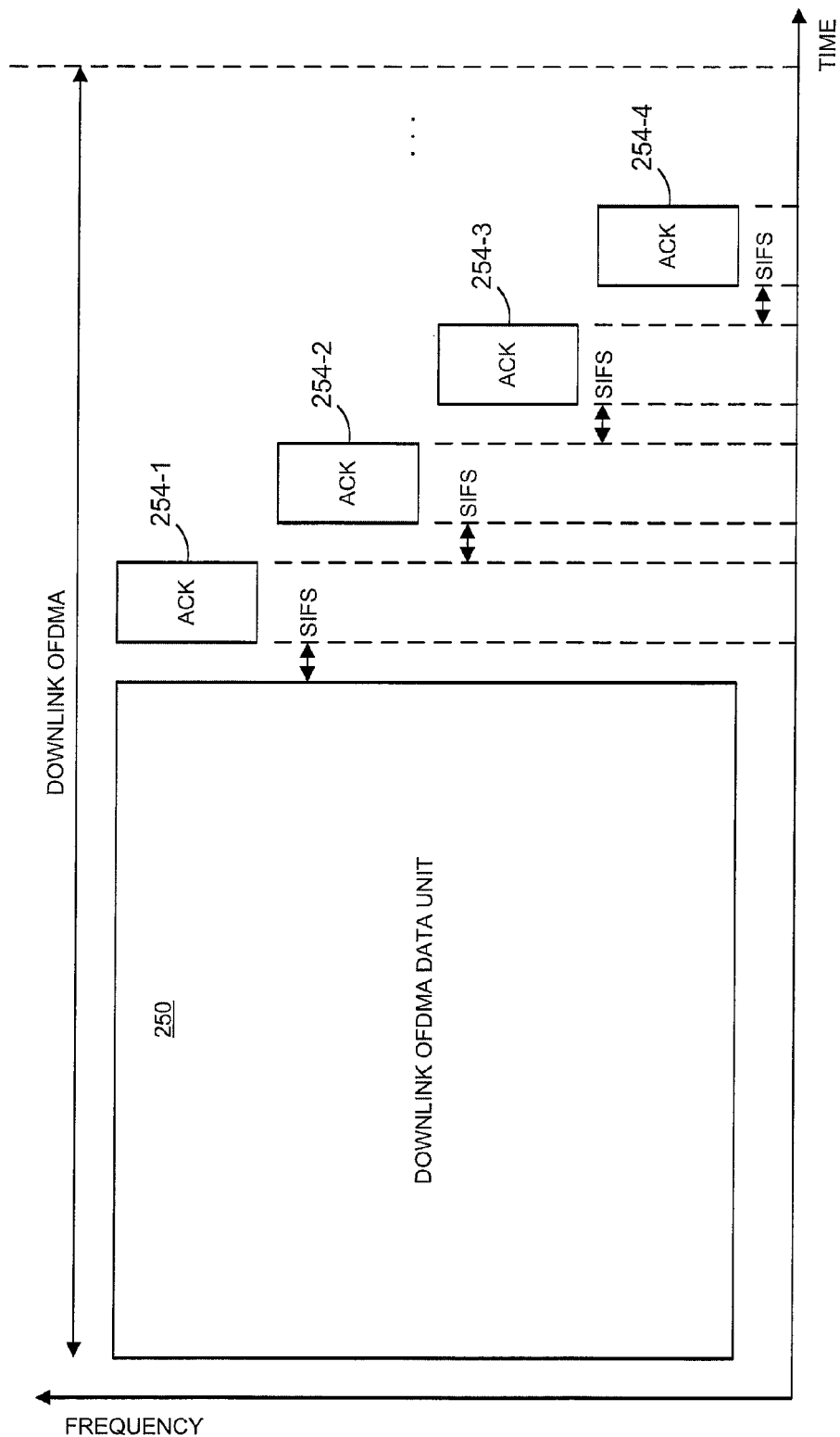


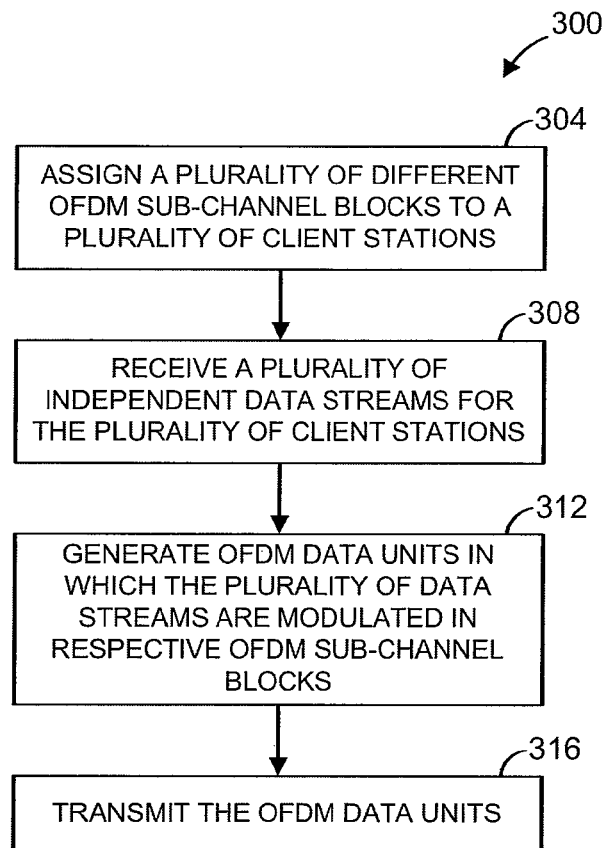
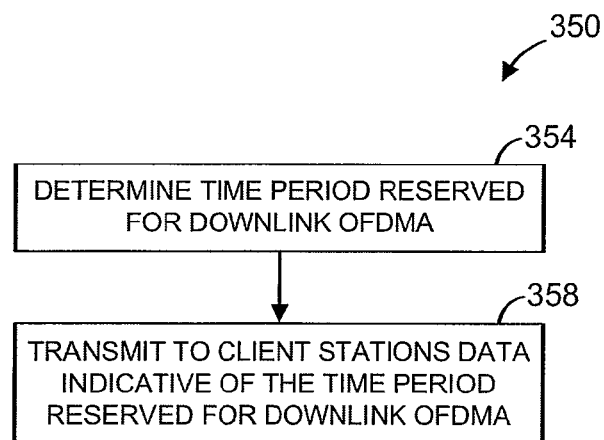
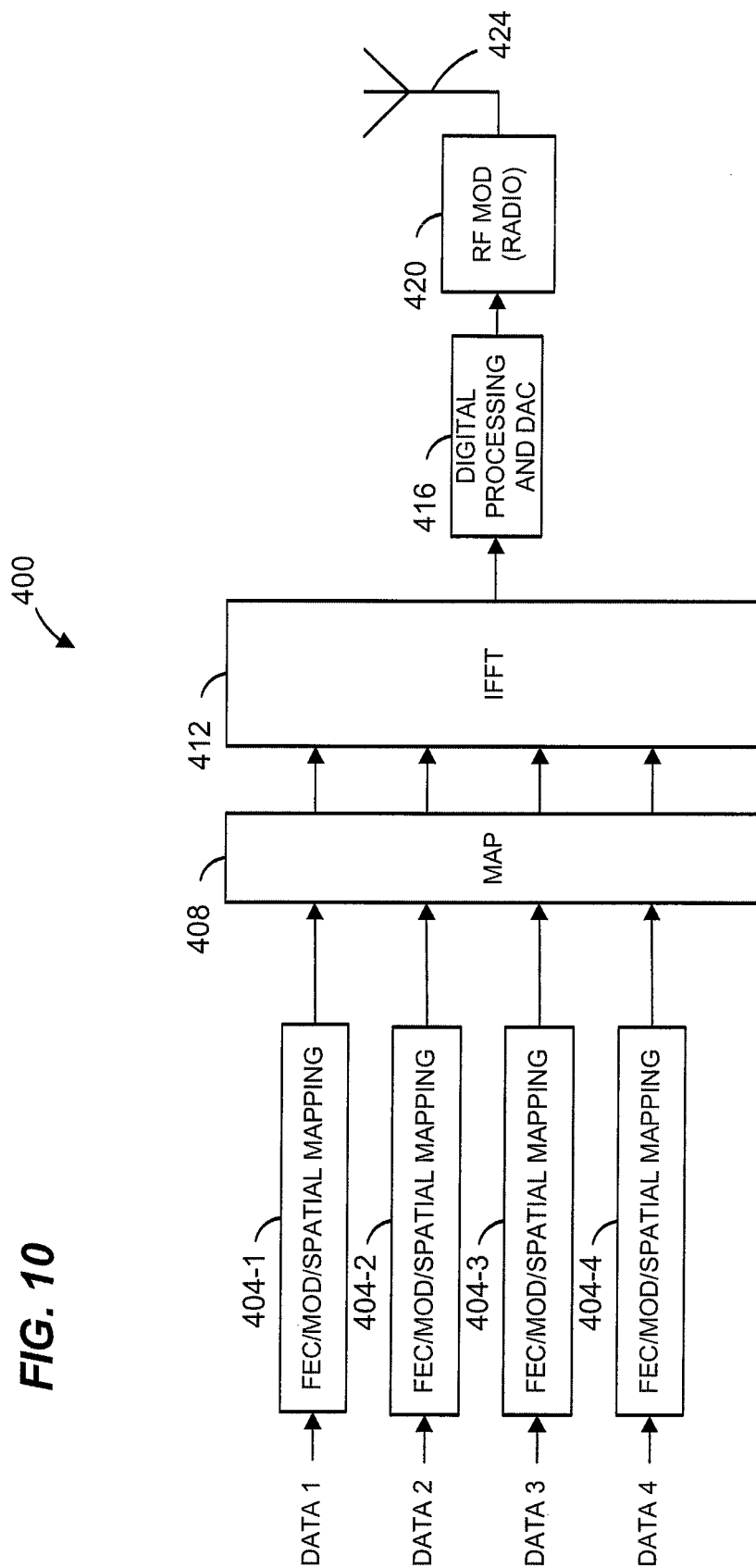
FIG. 8**FIG. 9**

FIG. 10



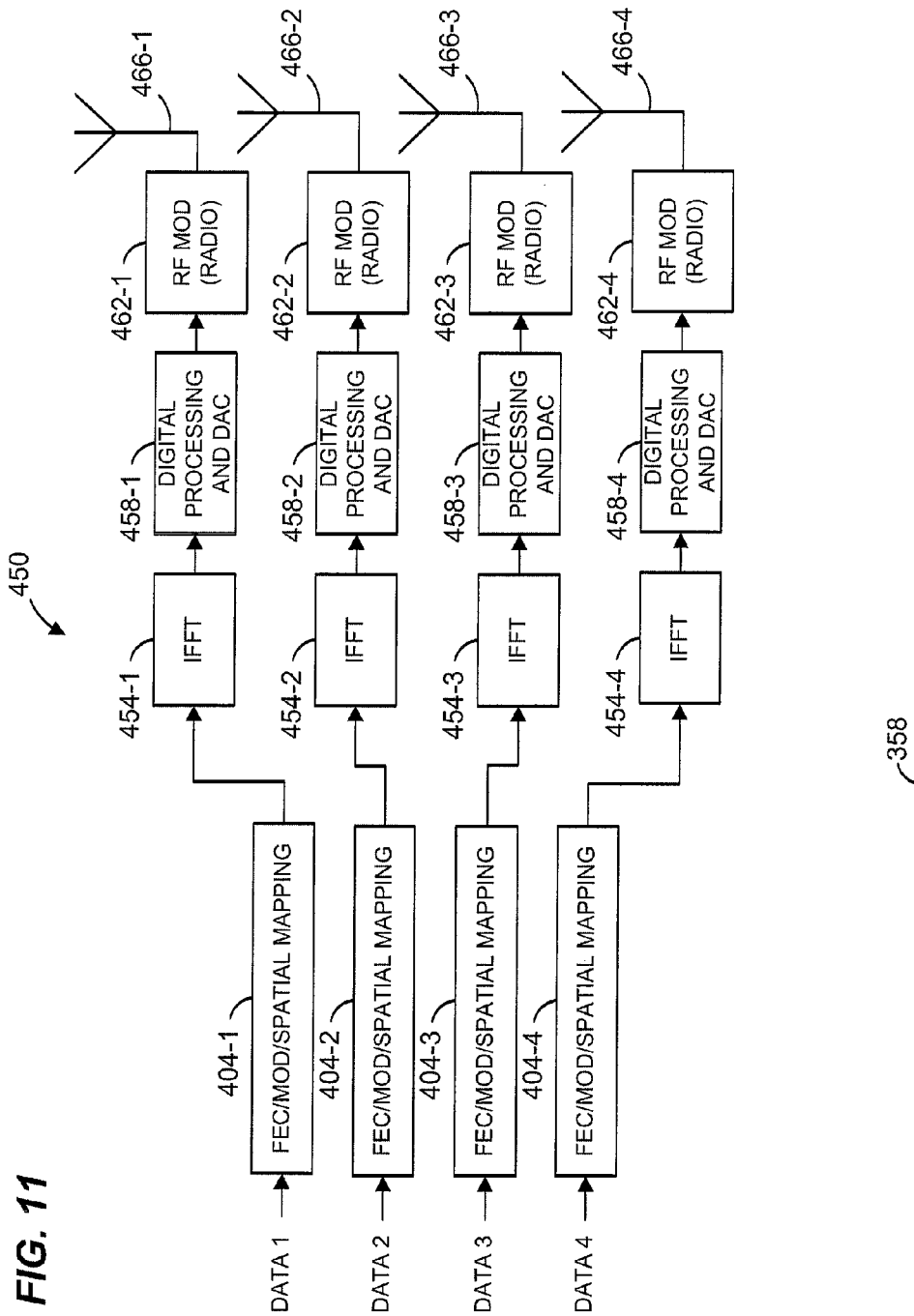


FIG. 12

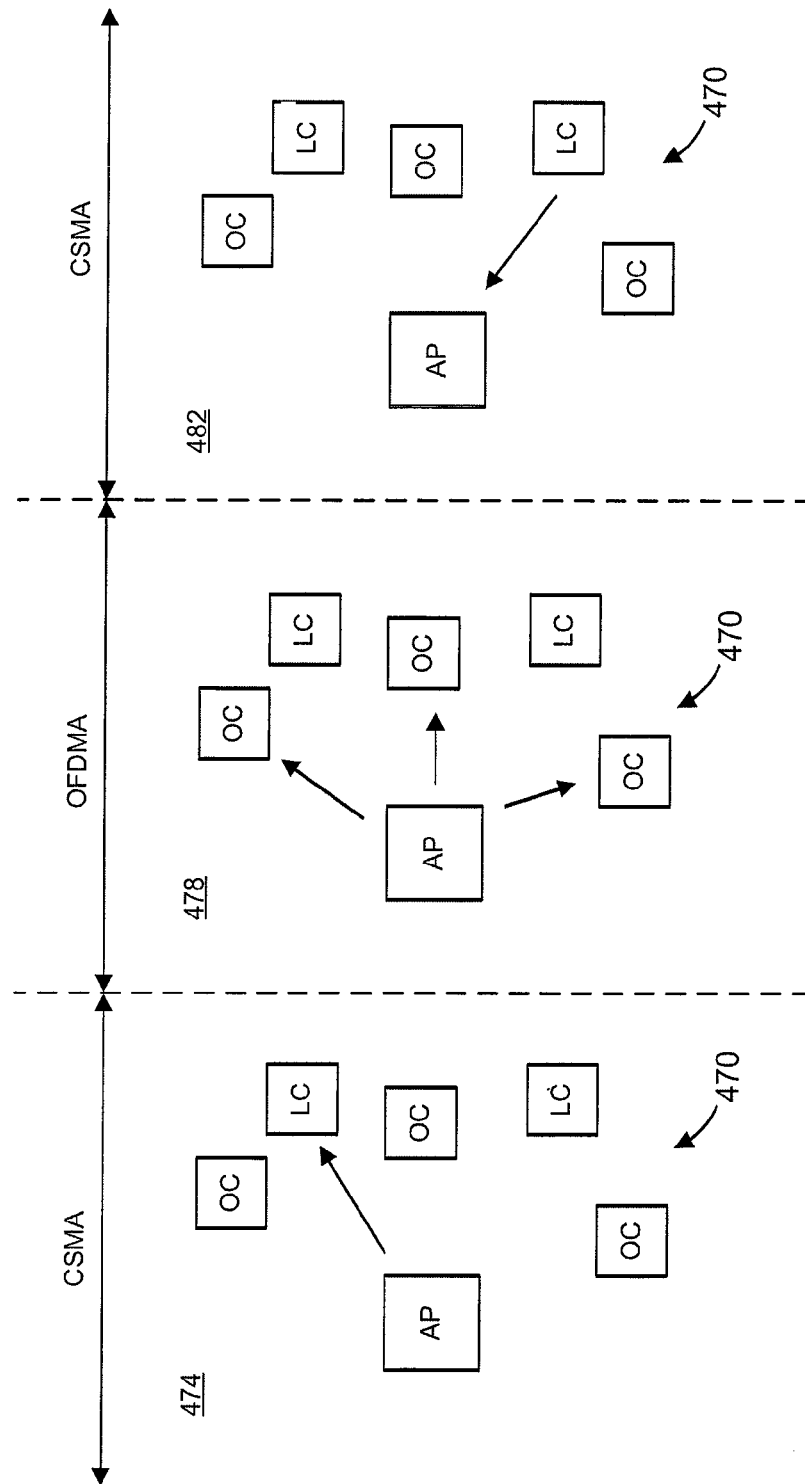
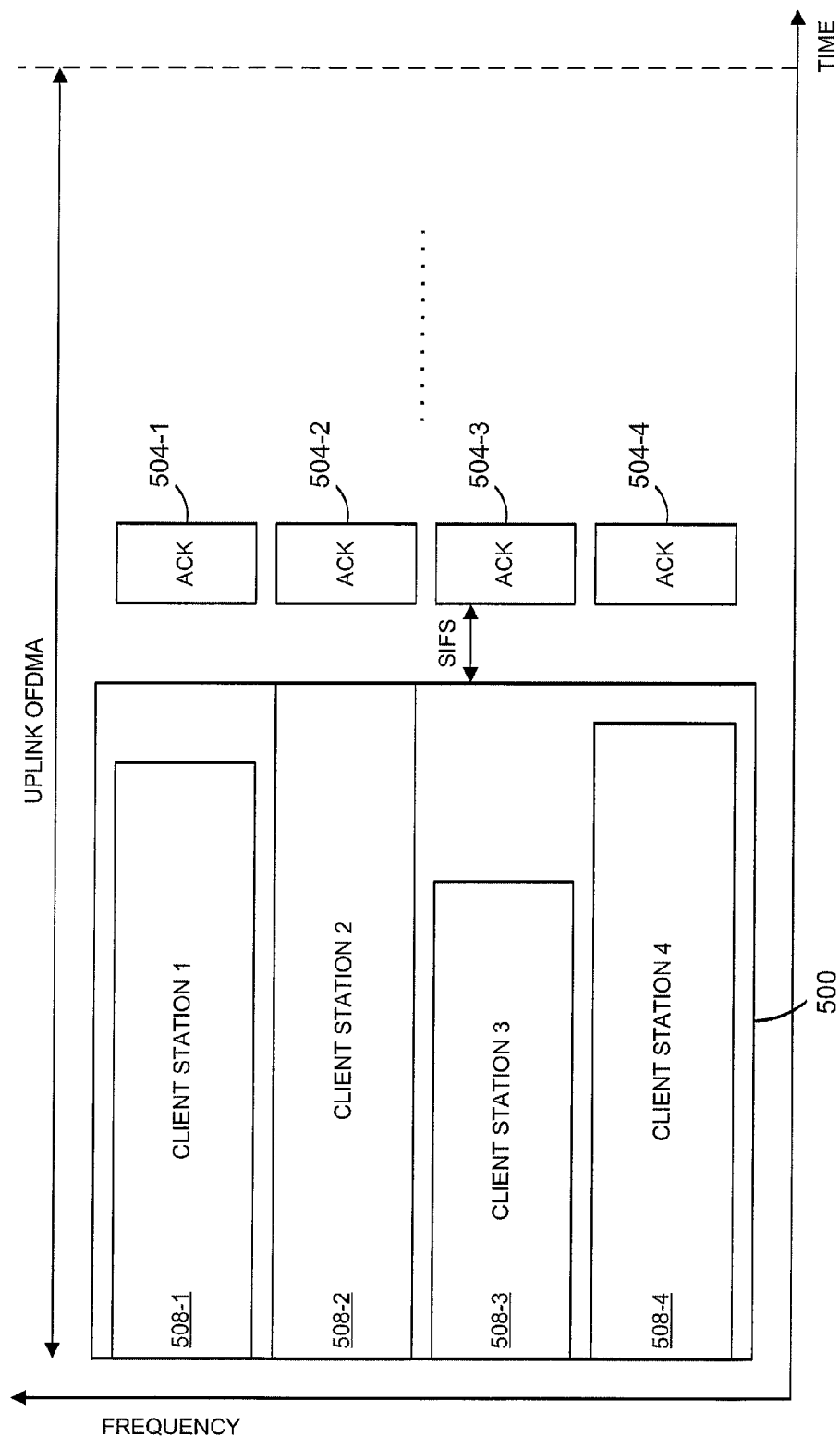


FIG. 13



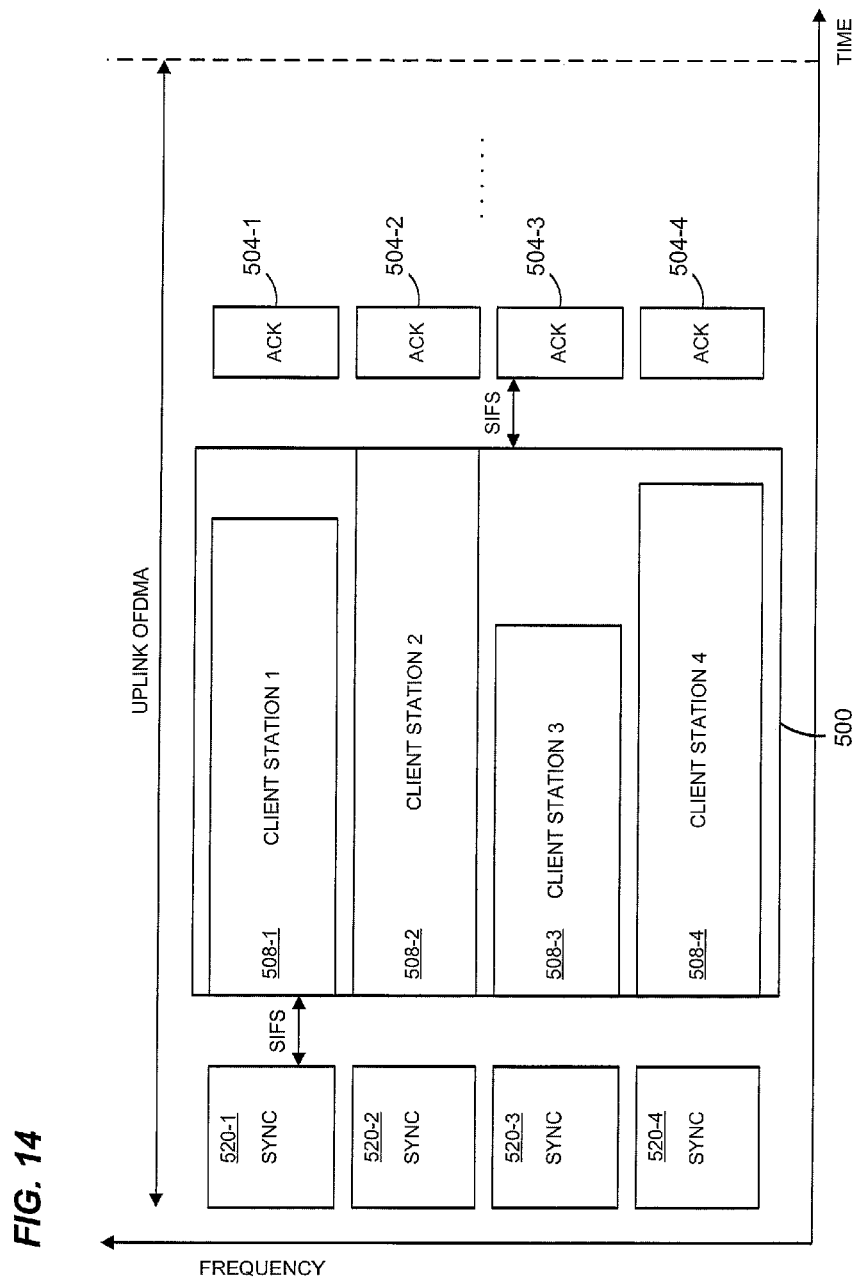


FIG. 15

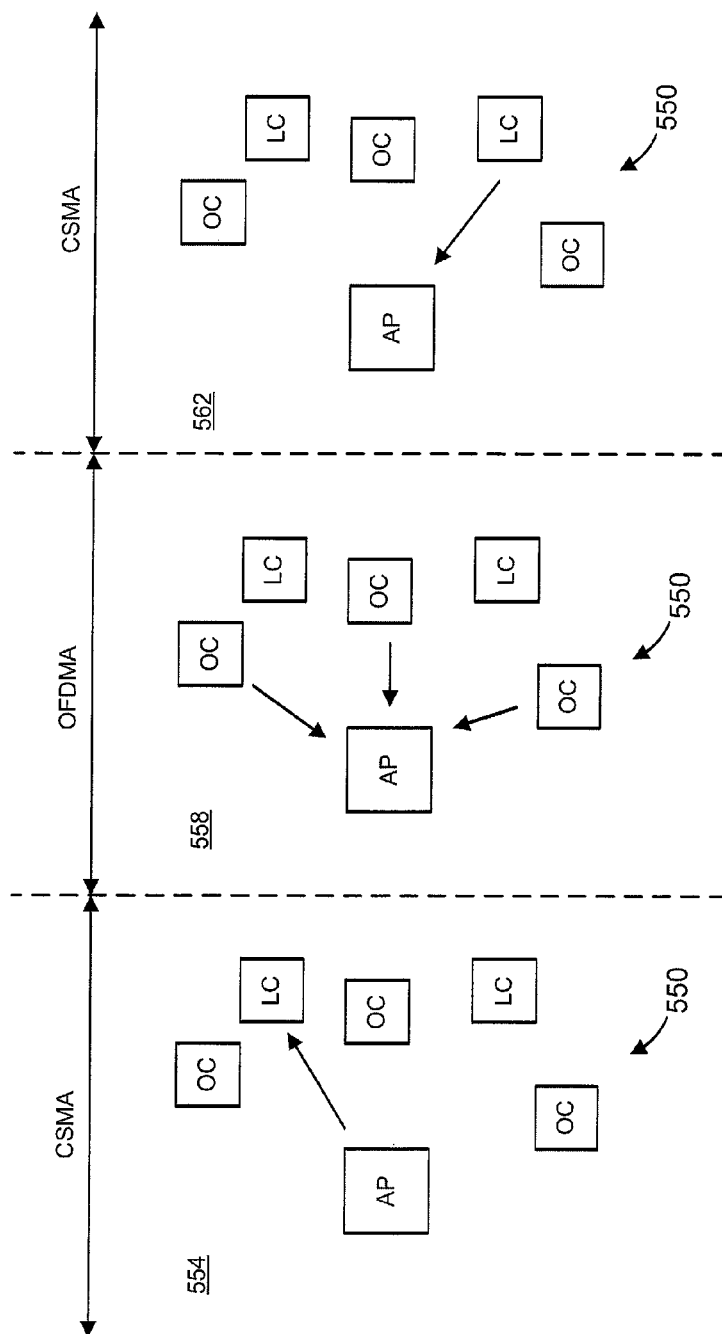
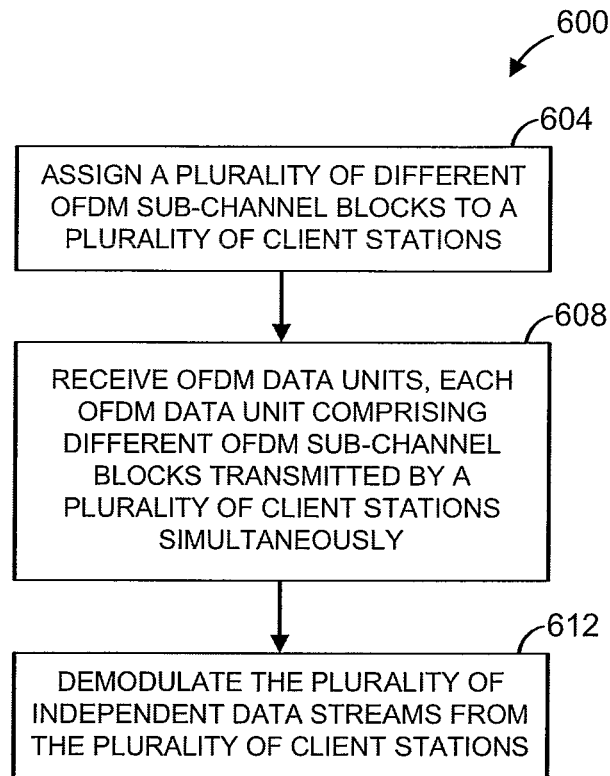
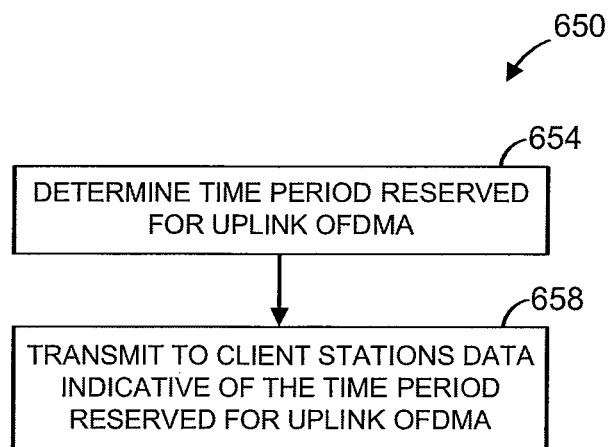


FIG. 16**FIG. 17**

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OFDMA WITH BLOCK TONE ASSIGNMENT FOR WLAN

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application that claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/162,780, entitled "Simple OFDMA with Block Tone Assignment for WLAN," which was filed on Mar. 24, 2009, the entire disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference herein.

FIELD OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present disclosure relates generally to communication networks and, more particularly, to wireless local area networks that utilize orthogonal frequency division multiplexing (OFDM).

BACKGROUND

The background description provided herein is for the purpose of generally presenting the context of the disclosure. Work of the presently named inventors, to the extent it is described in this background section, as well as aspects of the description that may not otherwise qualify as prior art at the time of filing, are neither expressly nor impliedly admitted as prior art against the present disclosure.

When operating in an infrastructure mode, wireless local area networks (WLANs) typically include an access point (AP) and one or more client stations. WLANs have evolved rapidly over the past decade. Development of WLAN standards such as the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 802.11a, 802.11b, 802.11g, and 802.11n Standards has improved single-user peak data throughput. For example, the IEEE 802.11b Standard specifies a single-user peak throughput of 11 megabits per second (Mbps), the IEEE 802.11a and 802.11g Standards specify a single-user peak throughput of 54 Mbps, and the IEEE 802.11n Standard specifies a single-user peak throughput of 600 Mbps.

These WLANs operate in either a unicast mode or a multicast mode. In the unicast mode, the AP transmits information to one client station at a time. In the multicast mode, the same information is transmitted to a group of client stations concurrently.

SUMMARY

In one embodiment, a method includes assigning a plurality of different orthogonal frequency division multiplexing (OFDM) sub-channel blocks to a plurality of devices including a first device and a second device. The plurality of OFDM sub-channel blocks includes a first OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the first device and a second OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the second device. The first device and the second device are members of a wireless local area network (WLAN). The method also includes receiving data for the first device, and receiving data for the second device. Additionally, the method includes generating OFDM data units, wherein data for the first device is modulated on sub-channels in the first OFDM sub-channel block and data for the second device is modulated on sub-channels in the second OFDM sub-channel block. The data for the first device is independent of the data for the second device. At least one of the OFDM sub-channel blocks is formatted to substantially conform to a physical layer specification of a WLAN communication

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protocol having a maximum channel bandwidth smaller than a bandwidth of the generated OFDM data units.

In other embodiments, the method may include one or more of the following features. At least one of the OFDM sub-channel blocks is formatted to substantially conform to at least one of the physical layer specification of the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 802.11a Standard and the physical layer specification of the IEEE 802.11a Standard.

At least one of the OFDM sub-channel blocks is formatted to conform to a defined communication protocol specification so that the OFDM sub-channel block includes data units that conform to the defined communication protocol specification.

Generating the OFDM data units comprises including, in each of a plurality of OFDM sub-channel block data units, a signal that indicates the OFDM sub-channel block portion is within an OFDM data unit having one or more other OFDM sub-channel blocks portions corresponding to one or more other devices.

Generating the OFDM data units comprises generating a first OFDM data unit having an OFDM sub-channel block data unit having a duration less than a duration of the first OFDM data unit.

Generating the OFDM data units comprises including in the OFDM sub-channel block data unit an indication of the duration of the first OFDM data unit.

Generating the OFDM data units comprises generating a first OFDM data unit having a first OFDM sub-channel block data unit corresponding to the first device and a second OFDM sub-channel block data unit corresponding to the second device. Additionally, the method further includes zero padding data for the first device so that a duration of the first OFDM sub-channel block data unit corresponds to a duration of the first OFDM data unit.

Generating the OFDM data units comprises generating a first OFDM data unit having a first OFDM sub-channel block data unit corresponding to the first device and a second OFDM sub-channel block data unit corresponding to the second device. Also, a data rate of the first OFDM sub-channel block data unit is different than a data rate of the second OFDM sub-channel block data unit.

The method further includes transmitting the OFDM data units.

The method further includes receiving an OFDM data unit including a plurality of acknowledgement or negative acknowledgment signals transmitted simultaneously by the first device and the second device.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an example wireless local area network (WLAN) 10, according to an embodiment;

FIGS. 2A, 2B, and 2C are diagrams illustrating example orthogonal frequency division multiplexing (OFDM) sub-channel blocks for an 80 MHz communication channel, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 3 is a diagram of an OFDM symbol that is partitioned into three OFDM sub-channel blocks for an 80 MHz communication channel;

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of an example downlink orthogonal frequency division multiple access (OFDMA) signal, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of an example downlink OFDMA signal, according to another embodiment;

FIG. 6 is a diagram illustrating the transmission of a downlink OFDMA data unit by an access point (AP), and the

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transmission of acknowledgment signals (ACKs) by client stations in response to the downlink OFDMA data unit, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 7 is a diagram illustrating the transmission of a downlink OFDMA data unit by an AP, and the transmission of ACKs by client stations in response to the downlink OFDMA data unit, according to another embodiment;

FIG. 8 is a flow diagram of an example method that is implemented by an AP in a WLAN, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram of another example method that is implemented by an AP in a WLAN, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 10 is a block diagram of an example physical layer (PHY) unit of an AP, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 11 is a block diagram of an example physical layer (PHY) unit of an AP, according to another embodiment;

FIG. 12 is a diagram illustrating communications in a WLAN during carrier sense multiple access (CSMA) time periods and an OFDMA time period, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 13 is a diagram illustrating the transmission of an uplink OFDMA data unit by a plurality of client stations, and the transmission of ACKs by the AP in response to the uplink OFDMA data unit, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 14 is a diagram illustrating the transmission of an uplink OFDMA data unit being preceded by the AP transmitting downlink synchronization signals 520, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 15 is a diagram illustrating communications in a WLAN during CSMA time periods and an OFDMA time period, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 16 is a flow diagram of an example method that is implemented by an AP in a WLAN, according to an embodiment; and

FIG. 17 is a flow diagram of another example method that is implemented by an AP in a WLAN, according to an embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In embodiments described below, a wireless network device such as an access point (AP) of a wireless local area network (WLAN) transmits independent data streams to multiple client stations simultaneously. In particular, the wireless device utilizes orthogonal frequency division multiplexing (OFDM) and transmits data for the multiple clients in different blocks of OFDM subchannels. Similarly, in embodiments described below, multiple client stations transmit data to an AP simultaneously, in particular, each client station utilizes OFDM and transmits data to the AP in a different block of OFDM subchannels.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an example wireless local area network (WLAN) 10, according to an embodiment. An AP 14 includes a host processor 15 coupled to a network interface 16. The network interface 16 includes a medium access control (MAC) unit 18 and a physical layer (PHY) unit 20. The PHY unit 20 includes a plurality of transceivers 21, and the transceivers are coupled to a plurality of antennas 24. Although three transceivers 21 and three antennas 24 are illustrated in FIG. 1, the AP 14 can include different numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 4, 5, etc.) of transceivers 21 and antennas 24 in other embodiments.

The WLAN 10 includes a plurality of client stations 25. Although four client stations 25 are illustrated in FIG. 1, the WLAN 10 can include different numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, etc.) of client stations 25 in various scenarios and embodi-

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ments. Two or more of the client stations 25 are configured to receive corresponding data streams that are transmitted simultaneously by the AP 14. Additionally, two or more of the client stations 25 are configured to transmit corresponding data streams to the AP 14 such that the AP 14 receives the data streams simultaneously.

A client station 25-1 includes a host processor 26 coupled to a network interface 27. The network interface 27 includes a MAC unit 28 and a PHY unit 29. The PHY unit 29 includes a plurality of transceivers 30, and the transceivers are coupled to a plurality of antennas 34. Although three transceivers 30 and three antennas 34 are illustrated in FIG. 1, the client station 25-1 can include different numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 4, 5, etc.) of transceivers 30 and antennas 34 in other embodiments.

In an embodiment, one or more of the client stations 25-2, 25-3, and 25-4 has a structure the same as or similar to the client station 25-1. In these embodiments, the client stations 25 structured like the client station 25-1 have the same or a different number of transceivers and antennas. For example, the client station 25-2 has only two transceivers and two antennas, according to an embodiment.

According to an embodiment, the client station 25-4 is a legacy client station that is not enabled to receive a data stream that is transmitted by the AP 14 simultaneously with other independent data streams that are intended for other client stations 25. Similarly, according to an embodiment, the legacy client station 25-4 is not enabled to transmit a data stream that to the AP 14 at the same time that other client stations 25 transmit data to the AP 14. According to an embodiment, the legacy client station 25-4 includes a PHY unit that is generally capable of receiving a data stream that is transmitted by the AP 14 simultaneously with other independent data streams that are intended for other client stations 25. But the legacy client station 25-4 includes a MAC unit that is not enabled with MAC layer functions that support receiving the data stream that is transmitted by the AP 14 simultaneously with other independent data streams that are intended for other client stations 25. According to an embodiment, the legacy client station 25-4 includes a PHY unit that is generally capable of transmitting a data stream to the AP 14 at the same time that other client stations 25 transmit data to the AP 14. But the legacy client station 25-4 includes a MAC unit that is not enabled with MAC layer functions that support transmitting a data stream to the AP 14 at the same time that other client stations 25 transmit data to the AP 14.

In an embodiment, the legacy client station 25-4 operates according to the IEEE 802.11a and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standards. The legacy client station 25-4, when it communicates with the AP 14, occupies an entire communication channel. For example, the IEEE 802.11a Standard defines communication channels each having a width of 20 MHz. When the AP 14 and the legacy client station 25-4 communicate according to the IEEE 802.11a Standard, the AP 14 transmits data to the legacy client station 25-4 in 64 OFDM subchannels that occupy the entire channel, and the legacy client station 25-4 transmits data to the AP 14 in the 64 OFDM subchannels. The IEEE 802.11n Standard defines 20 MHz and 40 MHz communications channels. When the AP 14 and the legacy client station 25-4 communicate according to the IEEE 802.11n Standard using a 20 MHz channel, the AP 14 transmits data to the legacy client station 25-4 in 64 OFDM subchannels that occupy the entire channel, and the legacy client station 25-4 transmits data to the AP 14 in the 64 OFDM subchannels. When the AP 14 and the legacy client station 25-4 communicate according to the IEEE

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802.11n Standard using a 40 MHz channel, the AP 14 transmits data to the legacy client station 25-4 in 128 OFDM subchannels that occupy the entire channel, and the legacy client station 25-4 transmits data to the AP 14 in the 128 OFDM subchannels.

According to the IEEE 802.11a and the IEEE 802.11n Standards, different devices share the communication channel by utilizing a carrier sense, multiple access (CSMA) protocol. Generally speaking, CSMA, according to the IEEE 802.11a and the IEEE 802.11n Standards, specifies that a device that wishes to transmit should first check whether another device in the WLAN is already transmitting. If another device is transmitting, the device should wait for a time period and then again check again to see whether the communication channel is being used. If a device detects that the communication channel is not being used, the device then transmits using the channel. With CSMA, in other words, data that is for a particular device (i.e., not multicast data) can only be transmitted on the channel when no other data is being transmitted on the channel.

According to an embodiment, the AP 14 is enabled to transmit different data streams to different client stations 25 at the same time. In particular, the PHY unit 20 is configured to transmit in a communication channel that is wider than specified by the IEEE 802.11a and the IEEE 802.11n Standards. For example, the PHY unit 20 is configured to transmit in one or more of an 80 MHz communication channel, a 120 MHz communication channel, and/or a 160 MHz communication channel, according to an embodiment. As another example, the PHY unit 20 is additionally configured to transmit in one or more of a 200 MHz communication channel, a 240 MHz communication channel, a 280 MHz communication channel, etc., according to an embodiment.

According to an embodiment, the AP 14 is configured to partition the wider communication channel into narrower sub-bands or OFDM sub-channel blocks, and different data streams for different client devices 25 are transmitted in respective OFDM sub-channel blocks. According to an embodiment, each OFDM sub-channel block substantially conforms to the PHY specification of the IEEE 802.11a Standard. According to another embodiment, each OFDM sub-channel block substantially conforms to the PHY specification of the IEEE 802.11n Standard. According to another embodiment, each OFDM sub-channel block substantially conforms to a PHY specification of a communication protocol other than the IEEE 802.11a and the IEEE 802.11n Standards.

As used herein, the phrase "OFDM sub-channel block substantially conforms to the PHY specification" of a communication protocol or standard generally means that a device (configured according to the communication protocol or standard) that receives the transmitted OFDM sub-channel block is able, generally, to detect and decode the data in the OFDM sub-channel block (signal strength, signal-to-noise (SNR), interference, etc., permitting). For example, an OFDM sub-channel block that substantially conforms to the PHY specification of a communication protocol or standard utilizes the modulation, tone mapping, pilot locations, etc., set forth in the communication protocol or standard, although other aspects of the OFDM sub-channel block do not conform to the PHY specification, according to an embodiment. For example, there may be more zero tones at the edges of an OFDM sub-channel block, reduced power (by frequency domain power allocation) at edge tones, etc., than called for by the communication protocol or standard. Similarly, as used herein, the phrase "a device configured to

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substantially conform to the PHY specification" of a communication protocol or standard generally means that the device is able to detect and decode a signal that conforms to an OFDM sub-channel block that substantially conforms to the communication protocol or standard (signal strength, signal-to-noise (SNR), interference, etc., permitting). The phrase "a device configured to substantially conform to the PHY specification" of a communication protocol or standard also generally means that the device is able to generate a signal that conforms to an OFDM sub-channel block that substantially conforms to the communication protocol or standard.

When an OFDM sub-channel block substantially conforms to the PHY specification of the IEEE 802.11a Standard, for example, a client device 25 corresponding to the OFDM sub-channel block utilizes a PHY unit 29 configured (or substantially configured) according to the IEEE 802.11a Standard to receive the data stream transmitted in the OFDM sub-channel block. When an OFDM sub-channel block substantially conforms to the PHY specification of the IEEE 802.11n Standard, for example, a client device 25 corresponding to the OFDM sub-channel block utilizes a PHY unit 29 configured (or substantially configured) according to the IEEE 802.11n Standard to receive the data stream transmitted in the OFDM sub-channel block.

According to an embodiment, each OFDM sub-channel block includes a contiguous block of OFDM sub-channels or tones that can be demodulated at the client station using a fast Fourier transform (FFT) with a width the size of the OFDM sub-channel block. In other words, according to this embodiment, the OFDM sub-channels assigned to client stations are not interleaved such as in the Wi-Max standard.

FIGS. 2A, 2B, and 2C are diagrams illustrating example OFDM sub-channel blocks for an 80 MHz communication channel, according to an embodiment. In FIG. 2A, the communication channel is partitioned into four contiguous OFDM sub-channel blocks, each having a bandwidth of 20 MHz. The OFDM sub-channel blocks include independent data streams for four client stations. In FIG. 2B, the communication channel is partitioned into two contiguous OFDM sub-channel blocks, each having a bandwidth of 40 MHz. The OFDM sub-channel blocks include independent data streams for two client stations. In FIG. 2C, the communication channel is partitioned into three contiguous OFDM sub-channel blocks. Two OFDM sub-channel blocks each have a bandwidth of 20 MHz. The remaining OFDM sub-channel block has a bandwidth of 40 MHz. The OFDM sub-channel blocks include independent data streams for three client stations.

Although in FIGS. 2A, 2B, and 2C, the OFDM sub-channel blocks are contiguous across the communication channel, in other embodiments the OFDM sub-channel blocks are not contiguous across the communication channel (i.e., there are one or more gaps between the OFDM sub-channel blocks). In an embodiment, each gap is at least as wide as one of the OFDM sub-channel blocks. In another embodiment, at least one gap is less than the bandwidth of an OFDM sub-channel block. In another embodiment, at least one gap is at least as wide as 1 MHz. In an embodiment, different OFDM sub-channel blocks are transmitted in different channels defined by the IEEE 802.11a and/or 802.11n Standards. In one embodiment, the AP includes a plurality of radios and different OFDM sub-channel blocks are transmitted using different radios.

In an embodiment, for a plurality of data streams transmitted by an AP in different OFDM sub-channel blocks, different data streams are transmitted at different data rates

when, for example, signal strength, SNR, interference power, etc., varies between client devices. Additionally, for a plurality of data streams transmitted by an AP in different OFDM sub-channel blocks, the amount of data in different data streams is often different. Thus, one transmitted data stream can end before another. In such situations, the data in an OFDM sub-channel block corresponding to data stream that is ended is set to zero or some other suitable predetermined value, according to an embodiment. FIG. 3 is a diagram of an (n+1)-th OFDM symbol that is partitioned into three contiguous OFDM sub-channel blocks for an 80 MHz communication channel. Two OFDM sub-channel blocks, corresponding to a Station 1 and a Station 3 each have a bandwidth of 20 MHz. The remaining OFDM sub-channel block, corresponding to a Station 2, has a bandwidth of 40 MHz. The OFDM sub-channel blocks include independent data streams for the three stations. The data stream corresponding to Station 2 ended in the n-th OFDM symbol (i.e., the OFDM symbol previous to the (n+1)-th OFDM symbol), whereas the data streams corresponding to Station 1 and Station 2 have not yet ended. Thus, for the (n+1)-th OFDM symbol, data in the OFDM sub-channel block corresponding to a Station 2 is set to zero.

An OFDM signal comprising a plurality of OFDM sub-channel blocks to transmit independent data streams as described above is also referred to herein as an orthogonal frequency division multiple access (OFDMA) signals. According to an embodiment, a WLAN utilizes downlink OFDMA signals and uplink OFDMA signals. Downlink OFDMA signals are transmitted synchronously from a single AP to multiple client stations (i.e., point-to-multipoint). An uplink OFDMA signal is transmitted by multiple clients stations jointly to a single AP (i.e., multipoint-to-point). Frame formats and/or signaling schemes for downlink OFDMA and uplink OFDMA are different, according to some embodiments.

Embodiments of a PHY frame format for downlink OFDMA signals will now be described. In the following embodiments, OFDM sub-channel blocks have a format substantially similar to the PHY format specified in the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In other embodiments, OFDM sub-channel blocks have a format substantially similar to another communication protocol such as the PHY format specified in the IEEE 802.11a Standard or a communication protocol not yet standardized.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of an example downlink OFDMA signal 100, according to an embodiment, that is partitioned into four equal-width OFDM sub-channel blocks 102 corresponding to four client stations. In the embodiment of FIG. 4, each OFDM sub-channel block 102 has a format substantially similar to the "mixed mode" data unit PHY format specified in the IEEE 802.11n Standard. For example, each OFDM sub-channel block includes a preamble 104 including a legacy short training field (L-STF), a legacy long training field (L-LTF), a legacy signal (L-SIG) field, a high throughput signal (HT-SIG) field, a high throughput short training field (HT-STF), and one or more high throughput long training fields (HT-LTF). Additionally, each OFDM sub-channel block includes a high throughput data field 108 (HT-DATA). The duration of the high throughput portion of the downlink OFDMA signal 100 is T, which corresponds to the longest of the four OFDM sub-channel blocks 102 (i.e., 102-4). In other words, the durations of the high throughput portions of the OFDM sub-channel blocks 102-1, 102-2, and 102-3 are shorter than the duration of the high throughput portion of the downlink OFDMA signal 100.

The legacy portion of the preamble 104 (i.e., L-STF, L-LTF, and L-SIG) is identical in all of the OFDM sub-channel blocks 102, according to an embodiment. For the high throughput portion of the preamble 104 (i.e., starting with HT-SIG), the content of the OFDM sub-channel blocks 102 can be variant for different client stations depending on factors such as rate, data quantity, configuration (e.g., number of antennas, number of supported multiple input, multiple output (MIMO) data streams, etc.) of different clients.

According to an embodiment, the AP sets the "reserved bit" in each of the L-SIG fields to "1" (the IEEE 802.11a and 802.11n Standards specify that the "reserved bit" in L-SIG to "0") to signal the receiver that the current data unit is a downlink OFDMA signal. Additionally, the AP sets the Length and Rate sub-fields in each of the L-SIG fields to correspond to T, the duration of the high throughput portion of the longest OFDM sub-channel block 102 (i.e., 102-4). According to another embodiment, the AP sets the "reserved bit" in each of the HT-SIG fields to "0" (the IEEE 802.11n Standard specifies that the "reserved bit" in HT-SIG to "1") to signal the receiver that the current data unit is a downlink OFDMA signal.

In other embodiments, the AP signals that a data unit is a downlink OFDMA signal using techniques other than those described above. For example, according to one embodiment, the AP uses MAC layer signaling to reserve a time period for transmitting a downlink OFDMA signal. In this embodiment, MAC layer signaling is utilized to specify the duration T of the downlink OFDMA signal 100. In another embodiment, MAC layer signaling does not specify the duration T of the downlink OFDMA signal 100, but rather specifies different respective times at which respective client stations should send respective acknowledgments of the downlink OFDMA signal 100. In another embodiment, the AP utilizes MAC layer signaling to specify a single time at which all client stations corresponding to the downlink OFDMA signal 100 should simultaneously transmit respective acknowledgments.

In one embodiment, each OFDM sub-channel block 102 in FIG. 4 has a width of 20 MHz. In another embodiment, each OFDM sub-channel block 102 in FIG. 4 has a width of 40 MHz. According to an embodiment, if an OFDM sub-channel block has a width of 40 MHz, the legacy portion of the preamble 104 (i.e., L-STF, L-LTF, and L-SIG) is duplicated at upper and lower 20 MHz halves, with the sub-channels in the upper 20 MHz phase shifted by 90 degrees with respect to the sub-channels in the lower 20 MHz.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of an example downlink OFDMA signal 150, according to an embodiment, that is partitioned into four equal-width OFDM sub-channel blocks 152 corresponding to four client stations. In the embodiment of FIG. 5, each OFDM sub-channel block 152 has a format substantially similar to the "Green field mode" data unit PHY format specified in the IEEE 802.11n Standard. For example, each OFDM sub-channel block includes a preamble 154 including an HT-SIG field, and HT-STF field, and one or more HT-LTF fields. Additionally, each OFDM sub-channel block 152 includes a high throughput data field 158 (HT-DATA). The duration of the downlink OFDMA signal 150 is T. The duration of each OFDM sub-channel block 152 is also T. In other words, the AP controls the duration of each OFDM sub-channel block 152 to be T, according to an embodiment. In one embodiment, the AP utilizes zero padding to ensure that each OFDM sub-channel block 152 has a duration of T. In one embodiment, a MAC unit of the AP zero pads one or more MAC service data units (MSDUs) that are included in a MAC protocol data unit

(MPDU), which is in turn included in a PHY protocol data unit (PPDU). By zero padding an MSDU, for example, the lengths of the MPDU and the PPDU are increased.

In an embodiment, the AP uses MAC layer signaling to reserve a time period for transmitting the downlink OFDMA signal **150**. In one embodiment, MAC layer signaling is utilized to specify the duration T of the downlink OFDMA signal **150**. In another embodiment, MAC layer signaling does not specify the duration T of the downlink OFDMA signal **150**, but rather specifies different respective times at which respective client stations should send respective acknowledgments of the downlink OFDMA signal **150**. In another embodiment, the AP utilizes MAC layer signaling to specify a single time at which all client stations corresponding to the downlink OFDMA signal **150** should simultaneously transmit respective acknowledgments.

In another embodiment, a downlink OFDMA signal includes one or more OFDM sub-channel blocks that have a format substantially similar to the "mixed mode" data unit PHY format specified in the IEEE 802.11n Standard and one or more OFDM sub-channel blocks that have a format substantially similar to the "Green field mode" data unit PHY format specified in the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In one implementation, the AP forms the downlink OFDMA signal so that the duration of each of the OFDM sub-channel blocks is the same. In another implementation, the duration of each of the OFDM sub-channel blocks need not be the same.

In another embodiment, a downlink OFDMA signal includes one or more OFDM sub-channel blocks that conform to a defined communication protocol specification, such as the IEEE 802.11ac Standard now in the process of being adopted, so that each OFDM sub-channel block in the OFDMA data unit forms an OFDM data unit. In some embodiments, information in preambles of OFDM sub-channel blocks of an OFDMA data unit indicate or signals that each OFDM sub-channel block is part of an OFDMA data unit. In an embodiment, such signaling information is included in a suitable preamble field such as a field that is the same as or similar to the L-SIG field and/or the HT-SIG field specified in the IEEE 802.11a and IEEE 802.11n Standards.

In some embodiments, client stations respond with an acknowledgment signal (ACK) or a negative ACK signal (NAK) after the AP transmits each downlink OFDMA data unit or after the AP transmits a plurality of downlink OFDMA data units (referred to as "Block ACK"). FIG. 6 is a diagram illustrating the transmission of a downlink OFDMA data unit **200** by an AP, and the transmission of ACKs **204** by client stations in response to the downlink OFDMA data unit **200**, according to an embodiment. In the scenario illustrated in FIG. 6, four client stations successfully received data transmitted in the downlink OFDMA data unit **200**. In response, each of the four client stations transmits an ACK **204** simultaneous with the transmission of the other ACKs **204**. The ACKs are transmitted after a short inter-frame space (SIFS) interval. In the IEEE 802.11n Standard, SIFS is specified as 16 microseconds, but any suitable SIFS period can be utilized, depending on the particular implementation. In an embodiment, the downlink OFDMA data unit **200** and the ACKs **204** are transmitted in a time period reserved for OFDMA transmissions in the WLAN. According to an embodiment, client stations transmit ACKs/NAKs by an uplink OFDMA data unit, which will be discussed in more detail below. Each client station transmits the ACK **204** in a different OFDM sub-channel block.

In one embodiment, each client station determines when to transmit an ACK/NAK based on a determined duration of

the OFDMA data unit **200**. As discussed above with respect to FIG. 4, the AP can provide information in the OFDMA data unit **200** that indicates the duration of the OFDMA data unit **200**, and a client station can use this information to determine when to transmit the ACK **204**. In another embodiment, the AP assigns a time slot to the client stations in which each client station can transmit an ACK/NAK. For example, a MAC unit in the AP can signal, in an OFDMA data unit previous to the OFDMA data unit **200**, the time period in which the client stations are to transmit ACKs/NAKs.

FIG. 7 is a diagram illustrating the transmission of a downlink OFDMA data unit **250** by an AP, and the transmission of ACKs **254** by client stations in response to the downlink OFDMA data unit **250**, according to an embodiment. In the scenario illustrated in FIG. 7, four client stations successfully received data transmitted in the downlink OFDMA data unit **250**. In response, each of the four client stations transmits an ACK **254** at different specified times. The downlink OFDMA data unit **250** and the ACKs are transmitted in a time period reserved for OFDMA. A MAC unit of the AP has signaled each of the client stations providing each client station with an indication of the time at which the client station can transmit an ACK/NAK. For example, according to an embodiment, the MAC unit of the AP provides ACK/NAK time slot information to the client stations when providing information regarding the reserved time period for OFDMA.

The ACKs are spaced by SIFS intervals. In an embodiment, the downlink OFDMA data unit **250** and the ACKs **254** are transmitted in a time period reserved for OFDMA transmissions in the WLAN. According to an embodiment, client stations transmit ACKs/NAKs by an uplink OFDMA data unit, which is discussed in more detail below. Each client station transmits the ACK **254** in a different OFDM sub-channel block.

In an embodiment, the AP assigns the time slots to the client stations in which each client station can transmit the ACKs/NAKs. For example, a MAC unit in the AP can signal, in an OFDMA data unit previous to the OFDMA data unit **250**, the time period in which a client stations is to transmit an ACK/NAK.

In another embodiment, ACKs/NAKs are transmitted by the client stations after receiving a plurality of downlink OFDMA data units (referred to as "Block ACK"). In this embodiment, a client station determines when to transmit a Block ACK based on determining a duration of a downlink OFDMA data unit or transmits in a time slot assigned by the AP, for example.

In an embodiment, the downlink OFDMA signal is configured to be received and decoded by a legacy client station (e.g., a client station configured to communicate according to the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard). In an embodiment, the AP does not signal to at least the legacy client stations that an OFDMA data unit is an OFDMA signal (as opposed to an OFDM data unit according to the legacy protocol (e.g., the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard). In an embodiment, at least OFDM sub-channel blocks corresponding to legacy client stations have the same duration as the downlink OFDMA signal so that ACKs/NAKs transmitted by the legacy client station occur at appropriate times with respect to the OFDMA data unit.

FIG. 8 is a flow diagram of an example method **300** that is implemented by an AP in a WLAN, according to an embodiment. At block **304**, a plurality of different OFDM sub-channel blocks are assigned to a plurality of different

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client stations. At block 308, a plurality of independent data streams (i.e., the streams include different data) are received, wherein each data stream corresponds to a respective client station, and the data streams are to be transmitted to the client stations. At block 312, downlink OFDM data units are generated such that the plurality of independent data streams are modulated in respective OFDM sub-channel blocks. In an embodiment, generating downlink OFDM data units comprises including an indication in a downlink OFDM data unit that the data unit is an OFDMA data unit (i.e., the data unit includes multiple OFDM sub-channel blocks corresponding to different client stations. In an embodiment, generating downlink OFDM data units comprises including an indication in an OFDM sub-channel block of a duration of a downlink OFDM data unit (i.e., an indication of a duration of the longest duration OFDM sub-channel block in the OFDMA data unit) separate from an indication of the duration of the OFDM sub-channel block. According to an embodiment, the indication of the duration of the downlink OFDM data unit includes an indication of a rate and an indication of a length corresponding to the longest duration OFDM sub-channel block in the OFDMA data unit.

At block 316, the AP transmits the OFDM data units generated at block 312.

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram of an example method 350 that is implemented by an AP in a WLAN, according to an embodiment. In an embodiment, the method 350 is implemented in conjunction with the method 300 of FIG. 8.

At block 354, the AP determines a time period that is reserved for downlink OFDMA signals. In one embodiment, the AP also determines a time or times at which client stations can transmit ACKs/NAKs or Block ACKs in response to downlink OFDMA data units.

At block 358, the AP transmits to the client stations data indicative of the time period determined at block 354. In one embodiment, the AP also transmits data indicative of the time or times at which client stations can transmit ACKs/NAKs or Block ACKs in response to downlink OFDMA data units.

FIG. 10 is a block diagram of an example PHY unit 400 of an AP, according to an embodiment. Referring again to FIG. 1, the PHY unit 20 of the AP 14 includes the PHY unit 400 of FIG. 10, in an embodiment.

The PHY unit 400 includes a plurality of processing blocks 404. In an embodiment, each processing block 404 performs forward error correction (FEC) encoding, modulation, and spatial mapping functions in a manner the same as or similar to such functions described in the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In FIG. 10, four processing blocks 404 are illustrated. In other embodiments, a different number of processing blocks 404 are included. For example, in one embodiment, a single processing block 404 is time-shared to process multiple data streams received in parallel.

The processing blocks 404 receive a plurality of independent data streams to be transmitted to a plurality of client devices. In the embodiment of FIG. 10, each processing block 404 processes a different one of the independent data streams and generates a plurality of constellation points corresponding to a plurality of OFDM sub-channels.

Outputs of the processing blocks 404 are provided to a mapping unit 408. The mapping unit 408 concatenates constellation points from the processing blocks 404 into a larger width OFDM symbol. For example, if the output of each processing block 404 corresponds to a 20 MHz wide (64-point inverse fast Fourier transform (IFFT)) OFDM symbol, then the mapping unit 408 concatenates the outputs

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of the processing blocks 404 into an 80 MHz wide (256-point IFFT). As another example, if the output of each processing block 404 corresponds to a 40 MHz wide (128-point IFFT) OFDM symbol, then the mapping unit 408 concatenates the outputs of the processing blocks 404 into a 160 MHz wide (512-point IFFT).

An IFFT unit 412 generates a time-domain signal from the output of the mapping unit 408. In an embodiment, the IFFT unit 412 has a width larger than in a typical AP configured to implement the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In one embodiment, the IFFT unit 412 implements a 256-point IFFT. In another embodiment, the IFFT unit 412 implements a 512-point IFFT. In another embodiment, the IFFT unit 412 implements a suitable width IFFT other than a 256-point IFFT or a 512-point IFFT.

A digital processing and digital-to-analog converter (DAC) block 416 processes the output of the IFFT unit 412 and generates an analog signal. In an embodiment, the digital processing and DAC block 416 includes a guard interval insertion unit. In another embodiment, the digital processing and DAC block 416 includes a windowing unit to smooth edges of each OFDM symbol. In an embodiment, the digital processing and DAC block 416 is configured to process signals with a larger bandwidth as compared to a similar processing block in a typical AP configured to implement the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In one embodiment, the digital processing and DAC block 416 is configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 80 MHz. In another embodiment, the digital processing and DAC block 416 is configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 160 MHz. In another embodiment, the digital processing and DAC block 416 is configured to process signals with a bandwidth different than 80 MHz or 160 MHz.

A radio frequency (RF) modulation block 420 generally upconverts the output of the digital processing and DAC block 416 to generate an RF signal, which is transmitted by an antenna 424. In an embodiment, the RF modulation block 420 is configured to process signals with a larger bandwidth as compared to a similar RF block in a typical AP configured to implement the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In one embodiment, the RF modulation block 420 is configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 80 MHz. In another embodiment, the RF modulation block 420 is configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 160 MHz. In another embodiment, the RF modulation block 420 is configured to process signals with a bandwidth different than 80 MHz or 160 MHz.

In an embodiment, the PHY unit 400 is a sub-unit in a MIMO PHY unit. In this embodiment, the MIMO PHY unit includes a plurality of digital processing and DAC blocks 416 and a plurality of RF modulation blocks 420 corresponding to a plurality of antennas 424. In another embodiment, the MIMO PHY unit includes a plurality of mapping units 408 and a plurality of IFFT units 412 corresponding to a plurality of transmit chains. In this embodiment, each processing block 404 generates a plurality of outputs corresponding to a plurality of spatially mapped transmit chain signals. In another embodiment, the MIMO PHY unit includes a beamforming unit.

FIG. 11 is a block diagram of an example PHY unit 450 of an AP, according to another embodiment. Referring again to FIG. 1, the PHY unit 20 of the AP 14 includes the PHY unit 450 of FIG. 11, in an embodiment.

The PHY unit 450 includes the plurality of processing blocks 404 of FIG. 10. A plurality of IFFT units 454 generate time-domain signals from the outputs of the processing

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blocks **404**. In an embodiment, each IFFT unit **454** has a width such as in a typical AP configured to implement the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In one embodiment, each IFFT unit **454** implements a 64-point IFFT. In another embodiment, each IFFT unit **454** implements a 128-point IFFT. In another embodiment, each IFFT unit **454** implements a suitable width IFFT other than a 64-point IFFT or a 128-point IFFT.

A plurality of digital processing and DAC blocks **458** process the outputs of the IFFT units **454** and generate corresponding analog signals. In an embodiment, each digital processing and DAC block **458** includes a guard interval insertion unit. In another embodiment, each digital processing and DAC block **458** includes a windowing unit to smooth edges of each OFDM symbol. In an embodiment, each digital processing and DAC block **458** is configured to process signals having a bandwidth such as in a typical AP configured to implement the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In one embodiment, each digital processing and DAC block **458** is configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 20 MHz. In another embodiment, each digital processing and DAC block **458** is configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 40 MHz. In another embodiment, each digital processing and DAC block **458** is configured to process signals with a bandwidth different than 20 MHz or 40 MHz.

A plurality of RF modulation blocks **462** generally upconvert the outputs of the digital processing and DAC block **458** to generate RF signals, which are transmitted by respective antennas **466**. In an embodiment, each RF modulation block **462** is configured to process signals having a bandwidth such as in a typical AP configured to implement the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In one embodiment, each RF modulation block **462** is configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 20 MHz. In another embodiment, each RF modulation block **462** is configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 40 MHz. In another embodiment, each RF modulation block **462** is configured to process signals with a bandwidth different than 20 MHz or 40 MHz.

In an embodiment, the PHY unit **450** is a sub-unit in a MIMO PHY unit. In one embodiment, the MIMO PHY unit includes an additional set of one or more of the IFFT units **454**, the digital processing and DAC blocks **458**, and the RF modulation blocks **462** for each of a plurality of transmit chains. In one embodiment, the MIMO PHY unit includes a beamforming unit.

In one embodiment, the AP utilizes a single MAC address for the different OFDM sub-channel blocks. In an embodiment, the AP includes a MAC unit that includes a plurality of transmit/receive processing blocks corresponding to the plurality of client devices with which the AP is communicating using OFDMA signals such as described above. The plurality of transmit/receive processing blocks in the MAC unit process the independent data streams simultaneously and/or in parallel.

In an embodiment, a client station that supports OFDMA signaling as described above includes a modified PHY unit (as compared to a PHY unit configured to operate according to the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard). For example, the modified PHY unit is configured to determine when a received data unit is within an OFDMA data unit, according to an embodiment. For instance, the PHY unit examines the L-SIG and/or HT-SIG “reserved” bits to detect an OFDMA data unit, in an embodiment. As another example, the modified PHY unit is configured to determine when an OFDMA data unit will end, as opposed

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to an OFDM sub-channel block within the OFDMA data unit that corresponds to the client station, according to an embodiment. For instance, the PHY unit examines the Length and Rate subfields in the L-SIG field to determine a duration of the OFDMA data unit for purposes of determining when to transmit an ACK/NAK, in an embodiment.

In an embodiment, a client station that supports OFDMA signaling as described above includes a modified MAC unit (as compared to a MAC unit configured to operate according to the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard). For example, the modified MAC unit is configured to interpret MAC signals from the AP regarding when the client can transmit ACKs/NAKs or Block ACKs, according to an embodiment. As another example, the modified MAC unit is configured to interpret MAC signals from the AP regarding periods reserved for OFDMA signals.

In an embodiment, a combination of PHY and MAC signaling is utilized for indicating OFDMA data units, the duration of OFDMA data units, and/or reserved time slots for OFDMA signals. In this embodiment, a client station that supports OFDMA signaling as described above includes a modified PHY unit and a modified MAC unit, such as described above.

FIG. 12 is a diagram illustrating communications in a WLAN **470** during three time periods: a first CSMA period **474**, an OFDMA time period **478**, and a second CSMA period **482**. In FIG. 12, time progresses from left to right so that the first CSMA period **474** occurs first, the OFDMA time period **478** occurs second, and the second CSMA period **482** occurs third. The WLAN includes an AP, a plurality of legacy client stations (LCs), and a plurality of OFDMA client stations (OCs).

In the first CSMA period **474**, the AP transmits a legacy downlink signal to one of the LCs. The OFDMA period **478** is reserved for OFDMA signal transmissions. Thus, in the OFDMA period **478**, the AP transmits a downlink OFDMA signal to a plurality of OCs. The downlink OFDMA signal includes a plurality of OFDM sub-channel blocks corresponding to the plurality of OCs. In the OFDMA period **478**, the plurality of OCs also transmit ACKs/NAKs (not shown) in response to the downlink OFDMA signal, according to an embodiment. In the second CSMA period **482**, an LC transmits a legacy uplink transmission to the AP.

Embodiments of a PHY frame format for uplink OFDMA signals will now be described. In the following embodiments, OFDM sub-channel blocks have a format substantially similar to the PHY format specified in the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In other embodiments, OFDM sub-channel blocks have a format substantially similar to another communication protocol such as the PHY format specified in the IEEE 802.11a Standard or a communication protocol not yet standardized.

An uplink OFDMA signal comprises a plurality of OFDM sub-channel blocks, a plurality of which are transmitted by different client stations. In one embodiment, each OFDM sub-channel block substantially conforms to the “mixed mode” format as specified in the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In another embodiment each OFDM sub-channel block substantially conforms to the “Green field” format as specified in the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In another embodiment, the OFDM sub-channel blocks in an uplink OFDMA data unit are mixture of “mixed mode” and “Green field” substantially formatted data units.

In one embodiment, an uplink OFDMA data unit with mixed mode OFDM sub-channel blocks transmitted by the plurality of clients has a format the same as or similar to the format illustrated in FIG. 4. According to one embodiment,

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the L-SIG “reserved” bit is not set to indicate an OFDMA data unit. According to another embodiment, each client station sets the L-SIG “reserved” bit if the client station is aware that the OFDM sub-channel block that the client station is transmitting is part of an uplink OFDMA data unit. According to another embodiment, each client station does not set the Length and Rate subfields in the L-SIG field differently than when transmitting a CSMA signal. According to another embodiment, each client station sets Length and Rate subfields in the L-SIG field to correspond to the duration of the uplink OFDMA data unit if the client station is aware of the duration of the uplink OFDMA data unit.

In one embodiment, the AP reserves a time period for transmission of uplink OFDMA signals. In this embodiment, the AP transmits information regarding the starting time, ending time, and/or duration of the reserved time period to the client stations.

According to an embodiment, an AP capable of receiving an uplink OFDMA signal includes an RF demodulation block, an analog-to-digital converter (ADC) and processing block, and an FFT unit that are configured to process signals with a larger bandwidth as compared to similar blocks in a typical AP configured to implement the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In one embodiment, these blocks are configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 80 MHz. In another embodiment, these blocks are configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 160 MHz. In another embodiment, these blocks are configured to process signals with a bandwidth different than 80 MHz or 160 MHz.

In another embodiment, an AP capable of receiving an uplink OFDMA signal includes a plurality of RF demodulation blocks, a plurality of ADC and processing blocks, and a plurality of FFT units that are configured to process signals process signals having a bandwidth such as in a typical AP configured to implement the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In one embodiment, each such block is configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 20 MHz. In another embodiment, each such block is configured to process signals with a bandwidth of 40 MHz. In another embodiment, each such block is configured to process signals with a bandwidth different than 20 MHz or 40 MHz. In these embodiments, the plurality of blocks operate in parallel to process each OFDM sub-channel block, which has a smaller bandwidth than the uplink OFDMA signal, in parallel.

In one embodiment, the AP utilizes a single MAC address for receiving different OFDM sub-channel blocks. In an embodiment, the AP includes a MAC unit that includes a plurality of receive processing blocks corresponding to the plurality of client devices with which the AP is communicating using OFDMA signals such as described above. The plurality of receive processing blocks in the MAC unit process the independent data streams received from the client stations simultaneously and/or in parallel.

In an embodiment, an AP that supports uplink OFDMA signaling as described above includes a modified PHY unit (as compared to a PHY unit configured to operate according to the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard). For example, the modified PHY unit is configured to operate at a wider bandwidth as described above, according to an embodiment.

In an embodiment, an AP that supports uplink OFDMA signaling as described above includes a modified MAC unit (as compared to a MAC unit configured to operate according to the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard). For example, the modified MAC unit is config-

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ured to determine when the AP can transmit ACKs/NAKs or Block ACKs, according to an embodiment. As another example, the modified MAC unit is configured to reserve time periods for uplink OFDMA signals.

In an embodiment, a legacy AP is capable of receiving and decoding data transmitted in an OFDM sub-channel block by a client station as part of an uplink OFDMA signal.

In an embodiment, a client that supports uplink OFDMA signaling as described above merely implements a PHY data unit that conforms to the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard. In another embodiment, a client that supports uplink OFDMA signaling as described above includes a modified PHY unit (as compared to a PHY unit configured to operate according to the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard). For example, the modified PHY unit is configured to perform PHY signaling regarding uplink OFDMA.

In an embodiment, a client that supports uplink OFDMA signaling as described above includes a modified MAC unit (as compared to a MAC unit configured to operate according to the IEEE 802.11a Standard and/or the IEEE 802.11n Standard). For example, the modified MAC unit is configured to determine when the AP can transmit uplink signals with respect to a reserved time period for uplink OFDMA, according to an embodiment.

FIG. 13 is a diagram illustrating the transmission of an uplink OFDMA data unit **500** by a plurality of client stations, and the transmission of ACKs **504** by the AP in response to the uplink OFDMA data unit **500**, according to an embodiment. In the scenario illustrated in FIG. 13, four client stations simultaneously transmit respective OFDM sub-channel blocks **508** to the AP. The OFDM sub-channel blocks **508** form the uplink OFDMA data unit **500**.

In the scenario illustrated in FIG. 13, the AP successfully received each of the OFDM sub-channel blocks **508**. In response, the AP transmits an OFDMA data unit that comprises ACKs **504** corresponding to different OFDM sub-channel blocks. In an embodiment, the OFDMA data unit that comprises the ACKs **504** has a format the same as or similar to a downlink OFDMA data unit as described with respect to FIG. 5, the same as or similar to a downlink OFDMA data unit as described with respect to FIG. 6, or has another suitable format.

The uplink OFDMA data unit **500** and the ACKs **504** are transmitted in a time period reserved for uplink OFDMA. A MAC unit of the AP has signaled each of the client stations providing each client station with an indication of the time at which the client station can transmit the corresponding OFDM sub-channel block **508**. For example, according to an embodiment, the MAC unit of the AP provides uplink OFDMA time slot information to the client stations.

The ACKs are spaced from the OFDMA data unit **500** by a SIFS intervals. In an embodiment, a MAC unit of a client station is configured to wait, after the corresponding OFDM sub-channel block, longer than the SIFS interval for an ACK/NAK from the AP. In an embodiment, the MAC unit of the client station is configured to wait for a time out period for retransmission if an ACK/NAK from the AP is not received, wherein the time out period is longer than the SIFS interval.

In an embodiment, the AP transmits Block ACKs after receiving several uplink OFDMA data units.

According to an embodiment, the AP transmits a synchronization signal to the client stations to help the client stations synchronize for transmitting an uplink OFDMA signal. In an embodiment, the synchronization signal is transmitted to the client stations as a downlink OFDMA signal. FIG. 14 is a

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diagram illustrating the transmission of the uplink OFDMA data unit **500** being preceded by the AP transmitting downlink synchronization signals **520**, according to an embodiment. In an embodiment, the synchronization signals **520** are transmitted to the client stations as a downlink OFDMA signal. The synchronization signals **520** have the same duration, according to an embodiment.

In the embodiment according to FIG. **14**, each client station transmits the corresponding OFDM sub-channel block **508** at a determined time duration after receiving the corresponding synchronization signal **520**.

FIG. **15** is a diagram illustrating communications in a WLAN **550** during three time periods: a first CSMA period **554**, an OFDMA time period **558**, and a second CSMA period **562**. In FIG. **15**, time progresses from left to right so that the first CSMA period **554** occurs first, the OFDMA time period **558** occurs second, and the second CSMA period **562** occurs third. The WLAN includes an AP, a plurality of legacy client stations (LCs), and a plurality of OFDMA client stations (OC).

In the first CSMA period **554**, the AP transmits a legacy downlink signal to one of the LCs. The OFDMA period **558** is reserved for uplink OFDMA signal transmissions. Thus, in the OFDMA period **558**, a plurality of OCs transmit an uplink OFDMA signal to the AP. The uplink OFDMA signal includes a plurality of OFDM sub-channel blocks corresponding to the plurality of OCs. In the OFDMA period **558**, the AP also transmits ACKs/NAKs (not shown) in response to the uplink OFDMA signal, according to an embodiment. According to an embodiment, in the OFDMA period **558**, the AP also transmits synchronization signals (not shown) prior to the uplink OFDMA signal. In the second CSMA period **562**, an LC transmits a legacy uplink transmission to the AP.

According to some embodiments, the above discussed OFDMA techniques are utilized in combination with simultaneous downlink transmission (SDT) techniques and simultaneous uplink transmission (SUT) techniques described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/175,526, entitled "Access Point with Simultaneous Downlink Transmission of Independent Data for Multiple Client Stations," filed on Jul. 18, 2008, and U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/175,501, entitled "Wireless Network with Simultaneous Uplink Transmission of Independent Data from Multiple Client Stations," filed on Jul. 18, 2008. Both of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/175,526 and U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/175,501 are hereby expressly incorporated by reference herein in their entireties.

FIG. **16** is a flow diagram of an example method **600** that is implemented by an AP in a WLAN, according to an embodiment. At block **604**, a plurality of different OFDM sub-channel blocks are assigned to a plurality of different client stations. At block **308**, OFDM data units are received, wherein each OFDM data unit comprises a plurality of different OFDM sub-channel blocks transmitted by the plurality of client stations simultaneously. In an embodiment, a plurality of independent data streams are modulated in respective OFDM sub-channel blocks.

At block **612**, the plurality of independent data streams are demodulated.

In another embodiment, the method includes transmitting a synchronization signal from the AP prior to receiving each OFDM signal at block **608**.

FIG. **17** is a flow diagram of an example method **650** that is implemented by an AP in a WLAN, according to an embodiment. In an embodiment, the method **650** is implemented in conjunction with the method **600** of FIG. **16**.

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At block **654**, the AP determines a time period that is reserved for uplink OFDMA signals. At block **658**, the AP transmits to the client stations data indicative of the time period determined at block **654**.

At least some of the various blocks, operations, and techniques described above may be implemented utilizing hardware, a processor executing firmware instructions, a processor executing software instructions, or any combination thereof. When implemented utilizing a processor executing software or firmware instructions, the software or firmware instructions may be stored in any computer readable memory such as on a magnetic disk, an optical disk, or other storage medium, in a RAM or ROM or flash memory, processor, hard disk drive, optical disk drive, tape drive, etc. Likewise, the software or firmware instructions may be delivered to a user or a system via any known or desired delivery method including, for example, on a computer readable disk or other transportable computer storage mechanism or via communication media. Communication media typically embodies computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules or other data in a modulated data signal such as a carrier wave or other transport mechanism. The term "modulated data signal" means a signal that has one or more of its characteristics set or changed in such a manner as to encode information in the signal. By way of example, and not limitation, communication media includes wired media such as a wired network or direct-wired connection, and wireless media such as acoustic, radio frequency, infrared and other wireless media. Thus, the software or firmware instructions may be delivered to a user or a system via a communication channel such as a telephone line, a DSL line, a cable television line, a fiber optics line, a wireless communication channel, the Internet, etc. (which are viewed as being the same as or interchangeable with providing such software via a transportable storage medium). The software or firmware instructions may include machine readable instructions that, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to perform various acts.

When implemented in hardware, the hardware may comprise one or more of discrete components, an integrated circuit, an application-specific integrated circuit (ASIC), etc.

While the present invention has been described with reference to specific examples, which are intended to be illustrative only and not to be limiting of the invention, changes, additions and/or deletions may be made to the disclosed embodiments without departing from the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method, comprising:

assigning, at a first communication device, a plurality of different orthogonal frequency division multiplexing (OFDM) sub-channel blocks to a plurality of other communication devices including a second communication device and a third communication device, wherein the plurality of OFDM sub-channel blocks includes a first OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the second communication device and a second OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the third communication device, and wherein the second communication device and the third communication device are members of a wireless local area network (WLAN);
receiving, at the first communication device, data for the second communication device;
receiving, at the first communication device, data for the third communication device; and

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generating, at the first communication device, an orthogonal frequency division multiple access (OFDMA) data unit, including generating a plurality of OFDM data units corresponding to the plurality of OFDM sub-channel blocks, wherein each OFDM data unit includes a respective preamble that occupies a bandwidth equal to or less than a bandwidth of the corresponding OFDM sub-channel block, and wherein the data received for the second communication device is modulated on sub-channels in the first OFDM sub-channel block and the data received for the third communication device is modulated on sub-channels in the second OFDM sub-channel block;

wherein the data for the second communication device is independent of the data for the third communication device; and

wherein at least one of the OFDM sub-channel blocks is formatted to substantially conform to a physical layer specification of a WLAN communication protocol having a maximum channel bandwidth smaller than a bandwidth of the generated OFDMA data unit.

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the OFDM sub-channel blocks is formatted to substantially conform to at least one of the physical layer specification of the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 802.11a Standard and the physical layer specification of the IEEE 802.11n Standard.

3. A method according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the OFDM sub-channel blocks is formatted to conform to a defined communication protocol specification so that the OFDM sub-channel block includes an OFDM data unit that conforms to the defined communication protocol specification.

4. A method according to claim 1, wherein generating the plurality of OFDM data units comprises including, in each of the plurality of OFDM data units, a signal that indicates the OFDM data unit is within an OFDMA data unit having one or more other OFDM data units corresponding to one or more other communication devices different than the second communication and the third communication device.

5. A method according to claim 1, wherein generating the plurality of OFDM data units includes generating a first OFDM data unit having a duration less than a duration of the OFDMA data unit.

6. A method according to claim 5, wherein generating the plurality of OFDM data units comprises: including in the first OFDM data unit an indication of the duration of the OFDMA data unit.

7. A method according to claim 1, wherein generating the plurality of OFDM data units includes generating a first OFDM data unit corresponding to the second communication device and a second OFDM data unit corresponding to the third communication device;

wherein the method further comprises zero padding data for the second communication device so that a duration of the first OFDM data unit corresponds to a duration of the OFDMA data unit.

8. A method according to claim 1, wherein generating the OFDM data units comprises generating a first OFDM data unit corresponding to the second communication device and a second OFDM unit corresponding to the third communication device;

wherein a data rate of the first OFDM data unit is different than a data rate of the second OFDM data unit.

9. A method according to claim 1, further comprising transmitting the OFDMA data unit.

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10. A method according to claim 9, further comprising receiving an OFDMA data unit including a plurality of acknowledgement or negative acknowledgment signals transmitted simultaneously by the second communication device and the third communication device.

11. An apparatus, comprising:

a wireless local area network (WLAN) network interface device having one or more integrated circuit (IC) devices; and

a physical layer (PHY) processing unit implemented on the one or more IC devices, the PHY processing unit configured to:

assign a plurality of different orthogonal frequency division multiplexing (OFDM) sub-channel blocks to a plurality of other communication devices including a first communication device and a second communication device, wherein the plurality of different OFDM sub-channel blocks includes a first OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the first communication device and a second OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the second communication device, and form, using data received for the first communication device and data received for the second communication device, an orthogonal frequency division multiple access (OFDMA) data unit that includes a first OFDM data unit corresponding to the first OFDM sub-channel block and a second OFDM data unit corresponding to the second OFDM sub-channel block, wherein each of the first OFDM data unit and the second OFDM data unit includes a respective preamble that occupies a bandwidth equal to or less than a bandwidth of the corresponding OFDM sub-channel block, and wherein the data received for the first communication device is modulated on sub-channels in the first OFDM sub-channel block and the data received for the second communication device is modulated on sub-channels in the second OFDM sub-channel block;

wherein the data for the first communication device is independent of the data for the second communication device; and

wherein each of the first OFDM data unit and the second OFDM data unit is formatted to substantially conform to a physical layer specification of a WLAN communication protocol having a maximum channel bandwidth smaller than a bandwidth of the generated OFDMA data unit.

12. An apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the PHY processing unit is configured to include, in each of a plurality of OFDM sub-channel block data units, a signal that indicates the OFDM sub-channel block data unit is within an OFDMA data unit having one or more other OFDM data units corresponding to one or more other communication devices.

13. An apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the PHY processing unit is configured to generate the OFDMA data unit so that one or both of (i) the first OFDM data unit and (ii) the second OFDM data unit has a respective duration less than a duration of the OFDMA data unit.

14. An apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the PHY processing unit is configured to include in the first OFDM data unit an indication of the duration of the OFDMA data unit.

15. An apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the PHY processing unit is configured to:

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zero pad data for the first device so that a duration of the first OFDM data unit corresponds a duration of the OFDMA data unit.

16. An apparatus according to claim 11, wherein a data rate of the first OFDM data unit is different than a data rate of the second OFDM data unit. 5

17. A method, comprising:
assigning, at a first communication device, a plurality of different orthogonal frequency division multiplexing (OFDM) sub-channel blocks to a plurality of other communication devices including a second communication device and a third communication device, wherein the plurality of OFDM sub-channel blocks includes a first OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the second communication device and a second OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the third communication device, and wherein the second communication device and the third communication device are members of a wireless local area network (WLAN);

receiving data for the second communication device; receiving data for the third communication device; and generating an orthogonal frequency division multiple access (OFDMA) data unit that includes a first OFDM data unit and second OFDM data unit respectively corresponding to the first OFDM sub-channel block and the second OFDM sub-channel block, wherein the data received for the second communication device is included in the first OFDM data unit corresponding to the first OFDM sub-channel block, and wherein the data received for the third communication device is included in the second OFDM data unit corresponding to the second OFDM sub-channel block;

wherein each of the first OFDM data unit and the second OFDM data unit includes a respective indication of a duration of the OFDMA data unit, and wherein at least one of (i) the first OFDM data unit and (ii) the second OFDM data unit has a respective duration different than the duration of the OFDMA data unit; and

wherein at least one of the OFDM sub-channel blocks is formatted to substantially conform to a physical layer specification of a WLAN communication protocol having a maximum channel bandwidth smaller than a bandwidth of the generated OFDMA data unit.

18. A method according to claim 17, wherein data for the second communication device is independent of the data for the third communication device. 45

19. A method according to claim 17, wherein a data rate of the first OFDM data unit is different than a data rate of the second OFDM data unit.

20. A method according to claim 17, further comprising transmitting the OFDMA data unit. 50

21. A method according to claim 20, further comprising receiving an OFDMA data unit including a plurality of acknowledgement or negative acknowledgment signals transmitted simultaneously by the second communication device and the third communication device. 55

22. An apparatus, comprising:

a wireless local area network (WLAN) network interface device having one or more integrated circuit (IC) devices; and

a physical layer (PHY) processing unit implemented on the one or more IC devices, the PHY processing unit configured to:

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assign a plurality of different orthogonal frequency division multiplexing (OFDM) sub-channel blocks to a plurality of other communication devices including a first communication device and a second communication device, wherein the plurality of OFDM sub-channel blocks includes a first OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the first communication device and a second OFDM sub-channel block assigned to the second communication device, and wherein the first communication device and the second communication device are members of a wireless local area network (WLAN),

receive data for the first communication device, receive data for the second communication device, and generate an orthogonal frequency division multiple access (OFDMA) data unit that includes a first OFDM data unit and second OFDM data unit respectively corresponding to the first OFDM sub-channel block and the second OFDM sub-channel block, wherein the data received for the first communication device is included in the first OFDM data unit corresponding to the first OFDM sub-channel block, and wherein the data received for the second communication device is included in the second OFDM data unit corresponding to the second OFDM sub-channel block;

wherein each of the first OFDM data unit and the second OFDM data unit includes a respective indication of a duration of the OFDMA data unit, and wherein at least one of (i) the first OFDM data unit and (ii) the second OFDM data unit has a respective duration different than the duration of the OFDMA data unit; and

wherein at least one of the OFDM sub-channel blocks is formatted to substantially conform to a physical layer specification of a WLAN communication protocol having a maximum channel bandwidth smaller than a bandwidth of the generated OFDM data units.

23. An apparatus according to claim 22, wherein data for the first communication device is independent of the data for the second communication device.

24. An apparatus according to claim 22, wherein a data rate of the first OFDM data unit is different than a data rate of the second OFDM data unit.

25. An apparatus according to claim 22, further comprising transmitting the OFDMA data unit.

26. An apparatus according to claim 25, further comprising receiving an OFDMA data unit including a plurality of acknowledgement or negative acknowledgment signals transmitted simultaneously by the first communication device and the second communication device.

27. An apparatus according to claim 25, wherein the PHY processing unit comprises one or more transceivers.

28. An apparatus according to claim 27, further comprising:

one or more antennas coupled to the one or more transceivers.

29. An apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the PHY processing unit comprises one or more transceivers.

30. An apparatus according to claim 29, further comprising:

one or more antennas coupled to the one or more transceivers.

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